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By Irving Babbitt

DEMOCRACY AND LEADERSHIP.
ROUSSEAU AND ROMANTICISM,
THE MASTERS OF MODERN FRENCH CRITICISM.
THE NEW LAOKOON.

An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts.

LITERATURE AND THE AMERICAN COLLEGE.

Essays in Defense of the Humanities.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

THE NEW LAOKOON

THE NEW LAOKOON

AN ESSAY ON THE CONFUSION
OF THE ARTS

BY
IRVING BABBITT



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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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Published May 1910

EIGHTH IMPRESSION, MARCH, 1929

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PREFACE

THE title I have taken for this book expresses my sense of what needs doing rather than what I myself would claim to have done. I have suffered, both in selecting a title and in treating my subject itself, from a certain poverty in our English critical vocabulary. The word *genre* seems to be gaining some currency in English. The same can scarcely be said of the *mélange des genres*; and yet it is around the *mélange des genres* and allied topics that my main argument revolves. Napoleon is reported to have said to Goethe in the course of a conversation on a problem very similar to the one I have attempted, "Je m'étonne qu'un aussi grand esprit que vous n'aime pas les genres tranchés." I have often been forced to borrow Napoleon's term and speak of the *genre tranché*, for lack of a suitable English equivalent.

Lessing published his "Laokoon" in 1766, toward the very end of the neo-classical movement. The period of nearly a century and a half that has since elapsed has seen the rise of the great romantic

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and naturalistic movement that fills the whole of the nineteenth century and is now showing signs of decrepitude in its turn. Does the "Laokoon" really meet the questions that have arisen in this period as to the proper boundaries of the arts, especially the boundaries of painting and writing? Most Germans would probably say that it does. They have surrounded Lessing, as one of their great classics, with a sort of conventional admiration. From this conventional admiration Hugo Blümner, to whom we owe the standard edition of the "Laokoon," is by no means free. Thus he says: "The tendency toward descriptive poetry . . . received through it [the 'Laokoon'] its death-blow. . . . We may indeed affirm that the law forbidding the poet to paint has nowadays become a universally accepted doctrine."¹ We doubt whether this is true even for Germany; it certainly is not true for other countries. If the "Laokoon" really covers the ground as completely as Blümner would have us suppose, we can only say that no teaching has ever been so wilfully disregarded. The nineteenth century witnessed the greatest debauch of descriptive writing the world

¹ *Laokoon*, ed. H. Blümner, 1880, p. 138.

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has ever known. It witnessed moreover a general confusion of the arts, as well as of the different *genres* within the confines of each art. To take examples almost at random, we have Gautier's *transpositions d'art*, Rossetti's attempts to paint his sonnets and write his pictures, Mallarmé's ambition to compose symphonies with words. Confusions of this kind were already rampant within a few years of Lessing's death, in the writings of Novalis, Tieck, and Friedrich Schlegel.

Now what I have tried to do is to study the "Laokoon," not primarily as a German classic, but as a problem in comparative literature; to show that the confusion with which Lessing is dealing is a pseudo-classical confusion, and that to understand it clearly we must go back to the beginnings of the whole movement in the critics of the Renaissance; and then, in contrast to this pseudo-classical confusion, I have traced in writers like Rousseau and Diderot the beginnings of an entirely different confusion of the arts, — a romantic confusion as we may term it, — which Lessing has not met in the "Laokoon" and has not tried to meet. I have followed out to some extent this romantic confusion

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in the nineteenth century, — especially the attempts to get with words the effects of music and painting. Finally, I have searched for principles that may be opposed to this modern confusion. Throughout I have done my utmost to avoid the *selva oscura* of æsthetic theory, and have kept as close as I could to the concrete example. I hope I have at least made clear that an inquiry into the nature of the *genres* and the boundaries of the arts ramifies out in every direction, and involves one's attitude not merely toward literature but life.

It involves especially a careful defining of certain large literary movements. In making his protest against the confusion of poetry and painting, Lessing was led to discriminate sharply between what he conceived to be the truly classic and the pseudo-classic. Any one who makes a similar protest to-day will need rather to discriminate between the truly classic and the romantic. Taken in both its older and more recent aspects, perhaps no question calls for more careful defining of such words as classic, pseudo-classic, and romantic. I confess that this is one of the reasons why it attracted me. A more searching definition of these words seems urgently

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needed. One of the ways in which comparative literature may justify itself is by making possible definitions of this kind that shall be at once broader and more accurate. Many people are inclined to see in the popularity of this new subject a mere university fad. They will not be far wrong unless it can become something more than an endless study of sources and influences and minute relationships. Neo-classicism and romanticism are both world-movements. It should be the ambition of the student of comparative literature to make all attempts to define these movements in terms of one literature seem one-sided and ill-informed.

The trouble with most attempts to define the word romantic, in particular, is that they have been partisan as well as provincial. The makers of the definitions have been themselves too much a part of what they were trying to define. They have opposed to their idea of the romantic a notion of the classic that would scarcely be avowed by a respectable pseudo-classicist. Indeed, the classical point of view has had about as much chance of a fair hearing during the past century as we may suppose the romantic point of view to have had in a Queen Anne

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coffee-house, or at the court of Louis XIV. The perspectives opened up by comparative literature will make it easier to achieve a feat that was achieved by few in the nineteenth century, — that of seeing the romantic and naturalistic movement from the outside.

This feat is already becoming somewhat easier of achievement, even without the help of comparative literature. It was in France, in the writings of Rousseau, that certain romantic and naturalistic points of view first found powerful expression. It is in France, the most intellectually sensitive of modern nations, that we now see the beginnings of reaction against the fundamental postulates of Rousseauism. M. Lasserre, whose brilliant and virulent attack on French romanticism¹ has already gone through several editions, says that his aim is not so much to attack this movement in its flowers and fruit as to pour a little poison about its roots. Unfortunately M. Lasserre's book tends to be extreme, and in the French sense reactionary. A year or so ago I chanced to be strolling along one of the narrow streets that skirt the Quartier Saint-Germain, and

¹ *Le romantisme français*, par P. Lasserre (1907).

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came on a bookshop entirely devoted to reactionary literature; and there in the window, along with books recommending the restoration of the monarchy, was the volume of M. Lasserre and other anti-romantic publications. Now I for one regret that a legitimate protest against certain tendencies of nineteenth-century life and literature should be thus mixed up with what we may very well deem an impossible political and religious reaction. A movement would seem needed that shall be somewhat less negative and more genuinely constructive than the one M. Lasserre and his friends are trying to start in France; a movement that shall preserve even in its severest questionings of the nineteenth century a certain balance and moderation, a certain breadth of knowledge and sympathy, and so seem an advance and not a retrogression. But with this reservation we must recognize that M. Lasserre's attack on the romantic and naturalistic point of view is very timely. With the spread of impressionism literature has lost standards and discipline, and at the same time virility and seriousness; it has fallen into the hands of æsthetes and dilettantes, the last effete representatives of romanticism, who

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have proved utterly unequal to the task of maintaining its great traditions against the scientific positivists. The hope of the humanities is in defenders who will have something of Lessing's virile emphasis on action, and scorn of mere revery,—who will not be content with wailing more or less melodiously from their towers of ivory.

Much that I have said in this book is a development of what I have already said in my book on "Literature and the American College," especially of the definition I have there attempted of the word humanism. Many of the views, again, that are expressed in the following pages, on the romantic movement, will need to be more fully developed, and this I hope to do at some future time in a book to be entitled "Rousseau and Romanticism." I should add that for the last eight or ten years I have been giving the main conclusions of the present volume to the students of one of my Harvard courses.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,

March 15, 1910.

PART I

THE PSEUDO-CLASSIC CONFUSION
OF THE ARTS

THE NEW LAOKOON

CHAPTER I

THE THEORY OF IMITATION

IT is rare to read through a critical treatise on either art or literature, written between the middle of the sixteenth and the middle of the eighteenth century, without finding an approving mention of the Horatian simile, "as is painting, so is poetry" (*ut pictura poesis*); or, if the mention is not of Horace, then it is of the equivalent saying of Simonides that "painting is mute poetry, and poetry a speaking picture." "There is no one," writes Father Mambrun in 1652, reviewing the critical literature of a century or more, "who has not been pleased with this comparison between poetry and painting."¹ Toward the beginning of the neo-classical period the saying of Simonides is perhaps more in favor, toward the end, that of Horace; but throughout the period the assimi-

¹ *Dissertatio peripatetica de epico carmine*, p. 41. See also p. 284.

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lation of poetry to painting that both sayings are supposed to justify, is insisted on as fundamental.

Fundamental, however, as was the doctrine *ut pictura poesis*, it was only as the corollary of a doctrine still more fundamental. To understand what this doctrine is, we need to go back to the beginnings of the whole movement in the Italian Renaissance. We can there follow the steps by which, in a comparatively short time, two documents, Horace's so-called "Ars Poetica" and Aristotle's "Poetics," acquired a supreme authority in criticism. The immense influence of Horace was in the main beneficial, though it made for an excellent prose rather than an excellent poetry. It found its consummation in seventeenth-century France,¹ where it contributed with other influences to the creating of modern French prose, — an achievement artistically so great that other nations sometimes seem to have attained a tradition of sound prose only in so far as they have learned from the French. Not even the ingenuity of a multitude of commentators succeeded

¹ I am of course counting Boileau among the influences that made for a sound prose. Boileau was about one part Aristotle to nine parts Horace.

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in obscuring seriously the Horatian good sense ; or if Horace was ever given a twist, it was, as in the case of the dictum *ut pictura poesis*, through the over-eagerness of the commentators to read into him an Aristotelian or pseudo-Aristotelian meaning.

The contrast in this respect between Horace and Aristotle may be inferred from the very title-page of the first modern commentary on the "Poetics," that of Robortello (1548), where the "Poetics" is proclaimed "a most difficult and obscure book, not previously elucidated by any one." Robortello goes on to say in his preface that it had always been held among scholars that Aristotle's "Poetics" was so hard that nobody could understand it, and that therefore he was fearful lest he should be thought guilty of presumption and conceit in trying to explain it at all. He then hazards the conjecture that Aristotle wrote so obscurely in order that he might deter slow-witted and indolent men from reading him, at the same time that he stimulated and delighted the ingenious. Accordingly, the ingenious set their wits to work on the "Poetics" and proceeded to turn out those formidable editions of the later Renaissance, where a slender rivulet of text

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is almost lost in the wide expanse of commentary. Goethe remarks that the "Poetics" has almost always done harm when interpreted apart from the general spirit of Aristotle's teaching as revealed in his other writings. Yet even when thus interpreted the "Poetics" contains so much that is profound and essential, that in spite of its fragmentary and uncertain text, its dryness and logic-chopping, the evil it wrought could not fail to be strangely mingled with the good. For example, in several of his plays Racine has attained not simply a regularity of structure, but an actual perfection of dramatic technique that is unsurpassed in ancient or modern literature; and we should remember how minutely Racine studied a work like that of Heinsius (*"De Tragœdiæ Constitutione,"* 1611), which is itself only a quintessence of the Aristotelian lore of the Renaissance.

Having granted thus much, we must recognize what an opportunity the "Poetics" gave pedants who wished to forge an instrument for tyrannizing over the individual conscience in matters of taste. As a body, these Italian critics are endlessly theoretical; they are often as repellent in form and ab-

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stract in substance as many of the German writers on æsthetics of the nineteenth century. They strike one as the kind of men who, a couple of centuries earlier, would have been scholastic philosophers, and now that Aristotle's authority was waning in other fields, were trying to impose it on art and literature. They carry into criticism the spirit of casuistry that was receiving a fresh impulse from the Counter-Reformation and the activities of the Jesuits. In fact, the more the neo-classical movement is studied, the more one whole side of it is seen to be merely the expression in matters artistic and literary of the Jesuitical spirit. Just as the Jesuits, in order to strengthen and centralize the principle of authority, were ready to multiply their minute rulings on moral "cases" even at the risk of suppressing spontaneity in the religious life and arriving at a pure formalism, so the Aristotelian commentators exercised a centralizing influence on literature and tended to substitute purely formal precepts for spontaneous opinions. We may push the analogy still further. Just as the Jesuits were very lenient to those who once accepted the outer authority, even if they lacked the ardor of inner piety, so the literary casuists held

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out to those who obeyed the "rules" the hope that they would be able to write a good epic or tragedy, let us say, even if they lacked any special inspiration.¹

The far-ranging speculations of the Renaissance about the end of poetry, decorum, probability, the laws of tragedy, epic, etc., tended, then, under the influence of the literary casuists, toward a pure formalism; and when we examine more closely we discover that the means used for thus exalting questions of form and neglecting what we should call nowadays the subjective side of art, was a certain idea of imitation. We have come at last to the doctrine we set out in search of, which dominates the whole neo-classical movement, and of which *ut pictura poesis* itself is but a corollary. "Poetry," says Fénelon in his letter to the French Academy, "is doubtless an imitation and a painting." Imitation is the great word on which everything hinges and to which everything must be made to conform. On

¹ Chapelain, for example, says that he hoped to show in *La Pucelle* that one who possessed the theory of the epic "might without any special elevation of mind put it successfully into practice."

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reading the title of the Abbé Batteux's "*Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe*" (1747), we may be sure in advance that the single principle to which he reduces all the arts is that of imitation. Now in giving this all-important rôle to imitation the neo-classicists, from the Italians of the sixteenth century to the Abbé Batteux, were up to a certain point true Aristotelians. Imitation is the pivotal word of the "*Poetics*." For Aristotle poetry not only imitates, but it imitates human actions, and not at random, but with reference to a definite plan or purpose: the poet is to turn away from himself and his own emotions, and work like the painter, with his eye on the object. Aristotle, in short, would have the poet intensely objective, but he would not therefore fix him in a rut of convention and traditionalism; yet it is in this latter direction, as we all know, that the neo-classic and pseudo-classic theorists tended.

To understand how, while claiming to follow Aristotle, these theorists really became pseudo-Aristotelian, we must consider certain other important aspects of the idea of imitation. The artist, says Aristotle, should imitate things not as they are but as they ought to be. He should give us truth, but a

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selected truth, raised above all that is local and accidental, purged of all that is abnormal and eccentric, so as to be in the highest sense representative. He should improve upon Nature with means drawn from Nature herself. Nature, in Dante's phrase, is like a great workman whose hand trembles,¹ and the artist should strive to realize this deeper purpose, which Nature suggests but does not actually fulfil. Probably the first mention in modern times of this profound and obscure doctrine of ideal imitation is that found in the "Poetics" of Daniello² (1536); and it is significant that Daniello's interpretation of the doctrine is already badly twisted. History for example differs from poetry, according to Daniello, not as a lower form of truth from a higher and more representative form, but as fact from fiction. We are going to see later that this notion of poetry as an agreeable falsity, united with the confusion of poetry and painting in its pseudo-classic form to encourage the kind of poetical diction that Wordsworth attacked in English. One point should be noted in passing: the painters and those who theorized about painting arrived at a clearer idea of

¹ *Par.*, XIII, v. 76.

² *La Poetica*, p. 41.

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Aristotle's meaning than the writers and literary theorists.¹ The "Discourses on Art" of Sir Joshua Reynolds, perhaps the best statement of the classical point of view in English, are no accident, but have behind them a long and in many respects a sound tradition² extending back to the Italian Renaissance.

At all events, the writers did finally come to understand thus much of Aristotle's meaning, — that they were not to imitate ordinary nature but a selected and embellished nature (*la belle nature* as the French critics termed it). But with reference to what model or standard were they to select in ar-

¹ My own impression in this matter has been confirmed by reading the very careful study by Mr. W. G. Howard of the maxim *ut pictura poesis*, especially as used by the painters. (See *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, xxiv, pp. 40-123.) Mr. Howard has embodied the main points of this paper in the edition of the *Laokoon* that he is just publishing (Henry Holt & Co., New York), and that I regret not having been able to use.

² Reynolds was initiated into this tradition not only by his residence in Italy (1749-52), but by reading such works as Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica* with the introductory "Parallel of Poetry and Painting" (1695). Reynolds took serious exception to the theory of imitation. See *Discourse xiii*.

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ricing at their ideal imitation? If they selected with reference to an image of perfection in the mind, they invited the reader or beholder likewise to look within in estimating the justness of the imitation. But to do this would for the neo-classicist be to lose himself in the vaguely subjective; it would be to set up an inner rather than an outer norm, the one thing above all he was trying to avoid. Why not get around the whole difficulty, and at the same time show proper humility, by foregoing the attempt to imitate Nature directly, and imitating rather those great writers in whom the voice of universal tradition tells us we find her idealized image?¹ Little need to go directly to nature, says Scaliger, when we have in Virgil a second nature.² The writer does not need to chase an elusive image of perfection in

¹ An argument similar to the one I have outlined here will be found at the beginning of Partenio's work *De Poetica Imitatione* (Venice, 1565).

² "Haec omnia, quae imiteris, habes apud alteram naturam, id est, Virgilium." Scaliger, *Poetices* lib. III, cap. iv. Virgil, as Pope tells us (*Essay on Criticism*), looked for his Nature to Homer:—

But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same, etc.

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his own mind, but merely to copy Virgil; and the reader is also saved the trouble of looking within, and has merely to compare Virgil with the copy.

There is thus added to the various real and supposed meanings of the word imitation in Aristotle a meaning that is comparatively un-Aristotelian, — the imitation of models. Reserving for separate discussion one especially important result of this coming together of the Aristotelian and un-Aristotelian meaning of the word imitation, we need simply note here how fully attention was thus turned toward the formal element of art and away from the element of personal feeling. Aristotle himself had said that metre, in which the musical throb of emotion is most distinctly felt, is not of the essence of poetry: its essence is rather in imitation, — not of the ordinary facts of life, but of those facts selected and arranged, as Aristotle would say, in what one is tempted to call his own special jargon, “according to probability or necessity.”

This theory of imitation does not work so badly for the drama, to which Aristotle specially applies it, being as it is the most objective of the literary forms, — the form that benefits most by strict motivation

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and logical structure. But even the pseudo-classicists felt the difficulty of making the theory work equally well for other literary forms, — lyrical poetry for instance : how was it possible to look on lyrical poetry as turned entirely to the painting of some outer object, and to sever the bond that connects it with individual emotion? “People may protest as follows,” says the Abbé Batteux: “‘What! . . . Is not poetry a song inspired by joy, admiration, gratitude? Is it not a cry of the heart, an enthusiasm (*élan*) in which Nature does everything and Art nothing? I do not see in it any painting or picture — but only fire, feeling, intoxication. So two things are true: first, lyrical poetry is true poetry; second, it is not an imitation.’”¹

We can agree with Batteux when he adds: “Here is the objection presented in all its force.” We need not follow the process by which he gets around the objection and proceeds to prove that lyrical poetry is only imitation after all; though this process would illustrate in a very interesting way the pseudo-classic attempt to discredit the spontaneous in favor of the formal, to identify art with artificiality.

¹ *Beaux-Arts*, etc., p. 244.

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He does, however, admit that the prophets, being as they were directly inspired by God, did not have to imitate. This is of course to admit a great deal. The true romantic poet, the wild-eyed magus of Victor Hugo (*mage effaré*), feels in his inspired moments that he is at least on a level with the prophets, if not with God himself.

When Batteux published his book, Rousseau was on the point of beginning his warfare in the name of feeling against everything formal and traditional. In his exaltation of feeling, Rousseau's method was to grope his way back to beginnings and to use to the utmost the argument of origins. Batteux already thinks it necessary to refer to and refute this appeal to origins. We should not, he says, go back to the first state of the arts, the mere lispings of infancy, when we are trying to define what they should be in their state of perfection.¹ At least passing mention should be made of an earlier use against the Aristotelians of the argument of origins. While the theory of imitation was still incubating in Italy, Patrizzi² protested against the critics who were thus

¹ *Beaux-Arts*, etc., p. 246.

² See *La Deca Disputata*, Ferrara, 1586.

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weaving a strait-jacket for poetry, and tending to stifle spontaneity under formalism. Poetry, says Patrizzi, took its rise in religious enthusiasm, rhythm is essential to its being ; it is not primarily an imitation. It would be possible to quote from him passages that seem to anticipate Wordsworth's definition of poetry : "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" ; passages that even remind one of the more recent Rousseauists, who delve in the depths of the primitive and seek for the origins of poetry in the rhythmic beat of communal sympathy. But such passages would be misleading : Patrizzi is a Platonist rather than a precursor of Rousseauism ; that is, he associates the beginnings of poetry with what is above the reason, rather than with the region of instinct that is below it.

By his radical departure from Aristotle, Patrizzi became the arch-dissenter of Renaissance criticism. Many persons had a sort of startled admiration for his enormous heresies, but he cannot be said to have been deeply influential. On the contrary, the tendency was to lose sight more and more of the roots of poetry in emotion and to identify it formally with painting through the interpretations that were given

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to the word imitation. Let us make this point clear by quoting still further the Abbé Batteux. After reducing, as we have seen, all the forms of poetry, even the lyric, to imitation, Batteux goes on as follows: "And so whether poetry sings the emotions of the heart, or acts, or narrates, or sets either gods or men to speaking, it is always a portrait of general nature (*la belle nature*), an artificial image, a picture, the one and only merit of which consists in right selection, arrangement, true likeness: *ut pictura poesis*."

Though the Horatian phrase thus recurs inevitably when the pseudo-classicist reaches a certain stage in his theorizing, the developments he gave to the phrase are evidently not to be found in the shrewd and untheoretical Horace. However little Aristotle himself would have countenanced the pseudo-classic confusions of poetry and painting, the point of departure of these confusions is evidently not merely in the general interpretation that was given to the "Poetics," but in certain specific passages: for example, where he says that the "poet is an imitator like a painter or any other artist," or where he proves the superior importance of plot

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over other elements in dramatic poetry by remarking that the most beautiful colors laid on confusedly will not give as much pleasure as the chalk outline of a portrait. Plot in writing thus corresponds to design in painting. Neo-classical critics are fond of discussing the elements in the art of writing that correspond to the other elements in pictorial art, — light, color, expression, etc., — though they are not always agreed as to these correspondencies. They did, however, finally reach a fair agreement as to what constitutes the element of poetical coloring. This conception of poetical coloring, arising as we have seen from the Aristotelian doctrine of imitation, finally united with the other or un-Aristotelian doctrine, i. e., the imitation of models, to encourage¹ the poetical diction which Wordsworth attacked in English, but the equivalent of which is found in other European languages.² Inasmuch as this important result of the pseudo-classic, or, as we may term it, formal confusion of poetry and painting, has

¹ Poetical diction was also encouraged by the whole theory of "ornament" that had come down from classical antiquity. See B. Croce, *Estetica*, pp. 70-76, 450-465.

² For French, see E. Barat: *Le style poétique et la révolution romantique* (1904).

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not been adequately noticed by Lessing, nor so far as I am aware by any other critic, it may here receive the separate discussion for which we have already reserved it.

CHAPTER II

POETICAL DICTION

SOMETHING has already been said of the bad twist that was given to Aristotle's doctrine of ideal imitation as early as Daniello: poetry is to differ from prose, not as a higher from a lower truth but as fiction from fact. Inasmuch as men are always more or less the victims of words, this view of poetry was encouraged by Aristotle's word for plot (*μῦθος*), which was rendered "fable." At first sight this emphasis on the fabulous and fictitious seems an invitation to the poet to mount the hippogriff; but the neo-classical hippogriff is tied to a tether. No sooner has the poet accepted the invitation to indulge himself freely in fiction, than he is confronted with the terrible phrase "according to probability or necessity." He is to be a liar, it is true, but a logical liar; for, as Rymer says, "What is more hateful than an improbable lie?" The neo-classical theorist is not willing to recognize that the imagina-

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tion has its own reasons of which the reason knows nothing; that there are other ways of making a thing probable, or convincing as we should say nowadays, besides merely appealing to one's logic and sense of fact; for this would be to recognize that region of the spontaneous and unexpected in human nature which he is doing his best to eliminate. Everything must be deliberate and prearranged, with no break in the sharp sequence of cause and effect. To be sure, there was one obstacle to thus making poetry purely rational and formal. Ancient authorities whom the neo-classicist was bound to respect had declared that poetry has nothing to do with reasoning, but is a sort of divine madness; and so, in an age of formalism, poetic fury itself became a formal requirement — something to turn on judiciously, about as one might turn on a tap. Few things are more amusing than the businesslike way in which the neo-classic poet speaks of his "rages" and his "fires." Some of the critics, even though they have to accept *furor poeticus*, strive at least to keep it within narrow limits. Thus Father Mambrun says that the epic poet must not be furious in the constitution of his plot, though he "does not deny

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that a little poetic fury may be sprinkled in in the episodes." ¹

In their attempt to deny the rights of the imagination the neo-classical theorists — or rather let us call them Jesuitical casuists — were led to convert the divine illusion of poetry into an agreeable falsity. Even in creating his fictions, or it might be more correct to say in manufacturing his lies, since he was supposed to do everything with malice prepense, the poet was not to imitate directly, that is, rely on his own resources ; for he might thus expose himself to being called " monstrous," the word that the neo-classicist always had in reserve for any one who was too unexpected. The poet was rather to fall back on the second main form of imitation, the imitation of models, and to copy the fictions that are already found in the ancient poets ; in other words, he was to draw freely on the wardrobe of mythological frippery, and many of the theorists demanded that he should not use even this fiction for its own sake, but merely allegorically, to inculcate some moral truth.

The poet, then, is an imitator, and a painter who

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

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in drawing his design, that is, in choosing a subject and mode of treatment, is to be unspontaneous and traditional. He is also to be unspontaneous and traditional in laying on his poetical colors; and by poetical colors the neo-classicist understands words, elegant phrases, figures of speech, and the like.¹ Horace already speaks of words as poetical colors² in much this sense, and the expression is found even in Wordsworth. Both words and imagery are regarded by the neo-classicist as being laid on like pigments from the outside. They are not, in Wordsworthian phrase, the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; they lack the vital thrill that would save them from artificiality. The result might not have been so bad if the poet had painted with his eye on the object. But at this point the other

¹ Batteux says that "les mesures et l'harmonie" constitute the coloring of poetry, "l'imitation," its design (*Op. cit.*, pp. 144, 146). The usual point of view is that of A. Donatus in his *Ars poetica* (Cologne, 1633): "Colores enim poetici verba sunt et locutiones," etc. Dryden includes in poetical coloring, "the words, the expressions, the tropes and figures, the versification, and all the other elegancies of sound," etc. *Essays*, Ker ed., II, p. 147.

² Cf. Dryden (Ker, II, p. 148): "*Operum colores* is the very word which Horace uses to signify words and elegant expressions," etc.

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theory of imitation intervened, and in supplying his palette with poetical colors (that is, words, happy phrases, figures of speech, etc.), he must not look to nature but to models. Wordsworth¹ and Coleridge both say that the habit of regarding the language of poetry as something dissociated from personal emotion, and as made up rather of words and flowers of speech culled from models, was promoted by the writing of Greek and Latin verse in school. To any one who composed by piecing together words and phrases he had picked out of a gradus, poetry came to seem, even in his own tongue, an artificial process.

Johnson praises Dryden as the father of poetical diction in English, and Dryden is reprobated for the same reason by Lowell. It is, of course, true that poetical diction came in with the whole French influence about the time of Dryden. It is also true

¹ Wordsworth says that he was

Misled in estimating words, not only
By common inexperience of youth,
But by the trade in classic niceties,
The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
From languages that want the living voice
To carry meaning to the natural heart, etc.

Prelude, vi. 107 ff.

Cf. also Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ch. i.

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that the model to whom the average poet of the eighteenth century turned when he was laying in a supply of poetical pigments, was not Dryden, but Pope, especially the translation of Homer. Evidently two things were needed to rid poetry of "its gaudiness and inane phraseology": first, that the poet should write with his eye on the object and not on the models and the stock of traditional poetical colors; second, that he should be spontaneous, so that his every word and phrase might be saved from artificiality and ring responsive to genuine feeling. The first of these two requirements was fulfilled, in England at least, before the second. For example, the "Nocturnal Reverie" of Lady Winchelsea, which Wordsworth praises, is more remarkable for its exact rendering of certain sights and sounds of nature without false finery or flowers of speech than it is for the true romantic thrill. The same may be said of Cowper and some other eighteenth-century poets. But poetic diction was far from being discredited by an occasional performance of this kind. There is no more flagrant example of poetic diction than Erasmus Darwin's "Botanic Garden"; unless, indeed, it be the early poems of Wil-

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liam Wordsworth, which show that the young poet already had his eye on the object ; but they are none the less filled with artificial elegancies and conventional adornments.¹ For Erasmus Darwin poetry is a process of painting to the eye. Both his theory² and practice are indeed merely the ultimate outcome of a confusion of poetry and painting that has its origins in the literary casuistry of the Renaissance. The confusion that led to poetical diction is fundamental in the neo-classic movement, and the reaction against poetical diction is equally fundamental in romanticism. The romantic movement probably did as much to compromise as it did to forward the standards of sound prose ; but it had a legitimate task in emancipating the poetic imagination from its strait-jacket of artificiality and convention. It is therefore important to note that the wave of emotion that finally swept away poetical diction in England came

¹ Cf. Legouis's *Wordsworth*, p. 131 ff.

² For Darwin's theory of poetry, see the " Interludes " that follow the cantos of his poem, especially the " Interlude " to Canto I of Part II (*The Loves of the Plants*, 1789). The acme of poetic artificiality was reached in France about the same time as in England, in the Abbé Delille's *Jardins* (1782), a work inspired by Thomson's *Seasons*.

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from France. "Guilt and Sorrow," the first poem in which Wordsworth attains vital directness and sincerity of expression, was written, not primarily under the influences of the ballads, or Milton, or Spenser, but under the emotional stress of the French Revolution; and Wordsworth is the father of nineteenth-century English poetry. Certain tendencies in eighteenth-century England, that bulk so largely in the eyes of some critics among the causes of the English romantic movement, still have about them something that is conventional and, in the neo-classical sense, imitative. The Spenserian and Miltonian revivals, for example, led simply to new forms of poetical diction. In laying in their assortment of poetical pigments people went to Spenser and Milton instead of to Pope.

My purpose, however, is not to go into a minute study of poetical diction. I have merely wanted to show how inevitably it arose from the formal identification, of poetry and painting. One would have expected this identification to lead not only to poetic diction, but to a general riot of word-painting and descriptive writing; as a matter of fact the possibilities of the theory in this direction were slow to

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develop, and the reason is not far to seek. Poetry, it is true, is an imitation and a painting, but a painting, the orthodox Aristotelian theorist would hasten to add, not of outer objects, but of human actions. To be sure, the critics were from the start not entirely agreed on this point. If we consult the literary case-books of the later Renaissance and early seventeenth century, we shall find that grave authorities are quoted, much as they might be in the Jesuitical case-books in theology, on both sides of the question as to what the poet may imitate. Too much Aristotelian rigor in interpreting the doctrine of imitation had some awkward consequences. If poetry could imitate only human actions, then the "Georgics" were not poetry, and yet Virgil was the supreme neo-classical model! Was it not veneration of Virgil that led to the reversion of the Aristotelian decision in so grave a matter as the relative dignity of tragedy and epic? It seems strange to us that men of undoubted intellectual power, like the best of the Renaissance critics, should have conducted such purely formal inquiries. The subjective test is alone intelligible for us. If a thing really "finds" us, we do not worry much about form or the dignity of

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genre. The actual appeal of a work of art "sinks the form, as of Drama or Epic," says Emerson, "out of notice. 'T is like making a question concerning the paper on which a king's message is written." But our sense of superiority should be tempered by the reflection that the neo-classic formalism was closely related to a virtue — the love of clear and logical distinctions; and that our modern appreciativeness is often only the amiable aspect of a fault — an undue tolerance for indeterminate enthusiasms and vapid emotionalism.

The love of clear distinctions and sharply defined types led the neo-classic writer to avoid a mixture that his theory would otherwise have permitted, — that of the poem in prose. For if the essence of poetry is not in metre but in imitation, why not imitate poetically in prose? That is, paint a picture of life not according to literal fact, of course, but "according to probability or necessity." Fénelon must have gone through some such reasoning when he wrote his "Télémaque," a genuinely neo-classic prose-poem, only remotely related to the poetical prose with which the romantic movement has made us familiar. Yet such was the prejudice in favor of the *genre*

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tranché that "Télémaque" did not escape censure. In Voltaire's "Temple du Goût" the repentant Fénelon is made to confess that there can be no true poem in prose.¹

To return to our main topic, we may surmise that the comparative lack of descriptive writing during the early part of the neo-classical period was due in part to concentration on man and human action, and in part to positive critical precept. Boileau is only repeating previous critics when he ridicules those who interrupt the course of a narrative to indulge in a long-winded description, for example, of some palace and its grounds. "I skip twenty pages to get to the end of it all," says Boileau, "and then escape with difficulty through the garden."² Early

¹ In the article "Épopée" (*Dict. philosophique*), Voltaire says: "Pour les poèmes en prose, je ne sais ce que c'est que ce monstre: je n'y vois que l'impuissance de faire des vers," etc. Cf., however, the Abbé Du Bos who approves of the prose poem on good neo-classic grounds (*Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, t. I, p. 510).

² Cf. D'Aubignac, *Pratique du théâtre*, p. 51: "Mal à propos le poète ferait une description exacte des colonnes, des portiques, des ornements . . . d'un temple," etc. Boileau had especially in mind in his satire the description of the magic palace in Canto III of Scudéry's *Alaric* which was itself suggested by previous descriptions in Ariosto, etc.

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in the eighteenth century, however, we can observe a change. There were already beginning to gather beneath the smug surface of neo-classic formalism those emotional elements that were destined to explode toward the end of the century. The age was gradually growing less humanistic in temper, and becoming more interested, both scientifically and sentimentally, in outer nature. A notable example of the latter kind of interest is Thomson's "Seasons." Whatever it may be in itself, considered as an influence, Thomson's "Seasons" is a pseudo-classical document. It led to a school of descriptive and pictorial poetry, but pictorial in a pseudo-classic sense, — that is, conceiving of words and phrases as pigments to be laid on from without; and this school was not slow to justify itself by an appeal to the maxim *ut pictura poesis*.

At the same time a somewhat different influence was also tending to confuse the standards of painting and poetry. We hear a great deal in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century of the *virtuosi*,¹ men who collected anything from

¹ An interesting article on the *virtuosi* by N. Pearson will be found in the *Nineteenth Century* for Nov., 1909.

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coins to butterflies, and were endlessly ridiculed by the wits of the time as examples of meaningless and random curiosity. The bent thus revealed for precise observation and classification may be connected directly with the founding of the Royal Society (1662), and in a more general way with the Baconian tradition. In the retrospect we can see that some of these *virtuosi* were on the way to become serious antiquaries, and that the antiquaries in turn prepared the way for Winckelmann and modern archæology. Now any one who got together a cabinet of antiques was naturally led to compare the treatment of the ancient legends, etc., in art with the treatment of the same legends by the poets; and at this point there intervened the inevitable *ut pictura poesis*, reinforced by the neo-classical notion that no one could do anything without copying from some one else. One of the first persons who encouraged this sort of thing, as Lessing complains, was Addison in his "Dialogues on Medals" (1702).

Perhaps the most important of the other authors who developed a parallelism between pictorial and plastic art on the one hand and poetry on the other, were Spence in his "Polymetis" (1747), and finally

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Count Caylus in his "Pictures Drawn from Homer" (1757). Lessing maintains that Spence's "book is absolutely intolerable to every reader of taste." This is not flattering for the English aristocracy of the period, many of the most distinguished of whom appear in the list of his subscribers and patrons. The general suggestion of these books is that the standards of poetic and plastic art are interchangeable, and that any good poetical picture may profitably be treated in the same way by the painter or sculptor. Spence, for example, becomes a fair mark for Lessing when he says (page 311), "Scarce anything can be good in a poetical description which would appear absurd if represented in a statue or picture." At the same time, if we study these writers directly, we shall be surprised to find how much more sensible they are than we should ever suppose from Lessing's attacks. Caylus, indeed, anticipates Lessing in important respects. "For every idea that he has borrowed from Caylus," says M. Rocheblave, "Lessing bestows upon him a censure."¹

We should now be prepared to understand the conditions that led to the writing of the "Laokoon."

¹ *Essai sur le Comte de Caylus*, par S. Rocheblave, p. 220.

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There was the school of descriptive poetry, largely imitative of Thomson's "Seasons"; there were also the new erudition and antiquarianism of the eighteenth century,¹ uniting with art and literature, and, like the school of descriptive poetry, making a liberal use of the maxim *ut pictura poesis*. The general background was the whole theory of imitation as elaborated by the critics of the Renaissance. Of these elements the theory of imitation is by far the most important, and it is the one of which the Germans in general have said the least.²

¹ For this revival of Greek in the eighteenth century and the coming together of antiquarianism and literature, see L. Bertrand: *La Fin du classicisme et le retour à l'antique*.

² For the period immediately preceding Lessing, F. Braitmaier's book (*Geschichte der Poetischen Theorie und Kritik von den Diskursen der Maler bis auf Lessing*, 1888), though dull, is fairly complete.

CHAPTER III

LESSING AND THE "LAOKOON"

ONE of the most important passages in Lessing is that in which he defends criticism — and by criticism he means the setting up of definite standards and a rational discipline — against those who asserted that it suppressed originality and genius. In this passage Lessing declares that he felt in himself no living fountain, and had to force everything out of himself by "pipes and pressure." "I should be poor, cold, short-sighted," he continues, "if I had not learned in a measure to borrow foreign treasures, to warm myself at foreign fires, and to strengthen my eyes by the glasses of art. I am therefore always ashamed or annoyed when I hear or read anything in disparagement of criticism. It is said to suppress genius, and I flattered myself I had gained from it something very nearly approaching genius. I am a lame man who cannot possibly be edified by abuse of his crutch."

Lessing, then, according to his own estimate, is

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more remarkable for his powers of assimilation than for his spontaneity. The more one studies the material that, from the Renaissance on, prepared the way for his work, — not to speak of the remoter classical background, — noting how much he owes not merely to those with whom he agrees, but even to the very Frenchmen, like Voltaire, whom he is striving to discredit, the more one is inclined to agree with Lessing's self-estimate; the more especially one studies the "Laokoon" in this way, the less it seems to contain that is strictly original. Evidently, if the Germans are to justify the high claims they make for Lessing as a critic, they must rest them on other grounds than his intellectual originality or the fineness of his taste. The decisive word about Lessing was really uttered by Goethe: We may, he said, have another intelligence like Lessing, but we shall wait long before seeing another such character.

Here is the point that must have chief emphasis in any right praise of Lessing. He is in some respects the most masculine figure Germany has produced since Luther; and without being too fanciful one may follow out certain analogies between

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the rôle played by Luther and that played by Lessing in an entirely different field. Luther protested against a Catholic Church that had colored the plain truth of Scripture with its own special tradition, perverted it with casuistry, overlaid it with false rites and ceremonies; even so Lessing protested against the critical creed the foundations of which were laid in sixteenth-century Italy, but which had been actually elaborated and imposed upon the world by the French, so as to become a sort of Catholic Church of literature, an orthodoxy which seemed to Lessing to have colored sound classical doctrine with its own special tradition, distorted it with casuistical interpretations, and turned the true spirit of the law into mere artificial rules and conventions. Just as Luther again, in distinguishing true Christianity from pseudo-Christianity, was led to set up the text of the Bible as a sort of visible absolute, a true and perfect touchstone in matters religious, so Lessing in distinguishing between the truly classical and the pseudo-classic set up Aristotle's "Poetics" as a sort of visible absolute, a complete criterion in everything relating to literature, especially the drama. Every one knows

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the passage in which Lessing declares that the "Poetics" is as infallible in its own way as the elements of Euclid. Furthermore, just as Luther, in emancipating Germany from spiritual servitude to Rome, aimed to set up a definite discipline in place of what he had abolished, and looked with horror on those who made use of their new liberty to fall into mere antinomianism, so Lessing, in emancipating Germany from intellectual and literary servitude to France, proposed to substitute a true code for the false code he had abrogated, and looked with disgust on the young antinomians of the Storm and Stress, who were for getting rid of all codes and setting up instead an uncharted emotionalism. Finally, just as Luther, though attacking the formalism of Rome, was himself in some sort a formalist by his emphasis on the text of the Bible, so Lessing, in his attack on neo-classic formalism, remained more or less of a formalist himself by his insistence on an infallible Aristotle.

From one point of view Lessing may be defined as the last and greatest of the Aristotelian formalists. The underlying unity of his critical work — both the "Laokoon" and "Hamburg Dramaturgy"

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— lies in his endeavor to distinguish the truly classic from the pseudo-classical ; and in practice this nearly always means, as I have said, to discriminate between true and false Aristotelianism. He disavows all claim to be systematic, but he is at least keenly logical and analytical. He has indeed laid himself open to the charge Cardinal Newman brings against Aristotle, that of looking on logic as the foundation of the fine arts. In general he is a lover of boundaries and distinctions, and of the clearly defined type, though not of course in a narrow or pedantic way. He even justifies in one passage a mixture of the *genres* by the somewhat unexpected argument that a mule is a very useful beast, in spite of the fact that it is neither a horse nor an ass.

We should add that there is one whole side of Lessing that is less humanistic and more humanitarian, a side that connects him with the great expansion of knowledge and sympathy just then beginning, and more specifically with the influence of a Frenchman like Diderot. Lowell, however, is very misleading when he describes Diderot as a "deboshed" Lessing. In reality the difference is far more fundamental. In his whole temper Lessing is

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not merely rational but disciplinary ; whereas Diderot, perhaps a more brilliant and certainly a more spontaneous genius, is deficient in this guiding and controlling judgment. Diderot, in his own phrase, lives at the "mercy of his diaphragm," tends to overstrain all boundaries of thought and feeling, and so prepares the way for the Titanism of every kind that has marked our modern emancipation.

Lessing, on the contrary, looks in his critical method backward to the Renaissance, rather than forward to the nineteenth century. If we approach his critical writings without preconceived notions or conventional admiration, we shall admit that there is something about them that from our point of view is foreign, remote, and disconcerting. He usually judges, not from the immediate impression, but by certain fixed laws and principles which he proceeds to found upon Aristotle. In this respect, if we may be allowed to digress for a moment, he is really farther away from us than Boileau ; for Boileau, who under certain romantic obsessions has come to be looked on as an arch-formalist, was in reality the leader of a reaction against formalism. Few contrasts, indeed, are more surprising than that between

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the real Boileau and Boileau the romantic bugaboo. Boileau was simply a wit and man of the world, not especially logical or imaginative or profound, but with an admirable integrity of character and an extraordinarily keen and correct sensibility. Literary works, and especially epics and tragedies, turned out mechanically according to the neo-classic recipes, had ended in intolerable boredom, and Boileau for one decided he could stand it no longer. It was in this spirit that he assailed and overthrew Chapelain, the chief of the Aristotelian formalists, whose perfectly "regular" epic, "*La Pucelle*," had no fault according to Boileau except that nobody could read it. Boileau's message to the authors of his time was simple: It is proper and indeed necessary for you to obey the rules, but at best the rules have only a negative virtue: the really important matter is that you should interest us. He added to his own precept his translation of Longinus "*On the Sublime*," with its constant measuring of literature not according to its formal perfection, but according to its power to stir emotion. As rendered by Boileau, Longinus takes his place with Horace and Aristotle as a supreme critical authority. Henceforth the appeal

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is even more to taste than to the rules: in other words, what we should call the subjective test receives increasing emphasis, though we may surmise that the emotional undercurrent we have already detected in the early eighteenth century, and which runs in Diderot into actual Titanic unrestraint, is something very different from the true spirit of Longinus.

Molière, although he had little faith even in the negative virtue of the rules, was with Boileau in other respects. He wrote the famous scene between Vadius and Trissotin in much the spirit in which his friend assailed Chapelain; but like most of the wits of the age of Louis XIV, Molière carried the warfare on pedantry to a point where it became a menace to sound learning and an encouragement to polite superficiality. Vadius is laughed at because he knows more Greek than any man in France; but, as Dr. Johnson would have told us, this is in itself the most respectable of accomplishments.

Now Lessing repudiated what was artificial and superficial in the French tradition, — its conventions, and etiquette, and gallantries, — but at the risk of losing a real virtue, viz., the exquisite urbanity that

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the French at their best had really succeeded in attaining. The ancients, says Lessing, knew nothing about politeness; whereupon, reverting to the tone of the Renaissance polemic, he proceeds to belabor the unhappy Klotz. Thus it has come about that in their exchanges of amenities German scholars even at the present day often make us think of Vadius and Trissotin. In short, Germany failed to get the full benefit of the great French reaction against pedantry, and still suffers from this failure. Lessing, indeed, is constantly reminding us of the type of scholar that flourished before the school of taste and urbanity, the type that we may define as the Leviathan of learning. Two other great figures of the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson and Bayle, also seem in some respects survivors of this earlier period. The antipathy Lessing felt for the French wit and courtier was not unlike that of Johnson for Chesterfield.

Lessing has little of the Longinian temper, and not enough of the new sensibility of the eighteenth century to be dominated by it. What we find in the "Laokoon" is not primarily an appeal to taste and feeling, but a mixture of Aristotelian theory and

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precise linguistic and antiquarian research. That is why a course of reading in the Renaissance critics is so immensely helpful in understanding him. Like virtually all these critics, except Patrizzi, he insists that art, including poetry, is an imitation. Like the most orthodox of them, he regards it not only as an imitation but as an imitation of human action. To action in the sense of plot or general purpose he would subordinate all other elements in poetry, such as character, sentiments, diction, etc., just as in painting he would subordinate all other elements — light, color, expression, etc. — to design. Some of the consequences of this Aristotelian orthodoxy make him seem to us, as I have already said, remote and foreign.

In one of his poems Matthew Arnold relates how in the course of a walk with a friend in Hyde Park they fell to talking of “Lessing’s famed Laocoön,” the doctrine of which Arnold sums up in part as follows : —

“Behold,” I said, “the painter’s sphere !
The limits of his art appear.
The passing group, the summer-morn,
The grass, the elms, that blossom’d thorn —

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Those cattle couch'd, or, as they rise,
Their shining flanks, their liquid eyes —
These, or much greater things, but caught
Like these, and in one aspect brought!
In outward semblance he must give
A moment's life of things that live;
Then let him choose his moment well,
With power divine its story tell." ¹

The last two lines are admirable, but Arnold can scarcely be said to be happy in his choice of illustrations. What are cows and elms and grass to one like Lessing, who is interested only in the painting of human action, and not of ordinary human action at that, but of ideal action in the Aristotelian sense of the word ideal, that is, action from which all irrelevant details are eliminated and in which everything is linked together "according to probability or necessity," and subordinated to some dramatic aim? He is impatient of everything that does not help forward this higher unity and converge toward the total effect. No one ever interpreted more strenuously Aristotle's great sentence: "The end is the chief thing of all." It is the goal of art that interests him rather than any pleasant

¹ *Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön.*

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vagabondage of fancy or sensibility on the way thither. He will have no expression for the mere sake of expression, no color for the pure delight of color. If the path is beautiful, says Anatole France, let us not ask where it is leading us. Lessing would not have even understood such a use of the word beautiful. In one passage he raises the question whether it would not have been better if painting in oil had never been invented, because of the tendency of color to scatter and distract the painter and keep him from concentrating on the end.¹ Elsewhere he says that "mere coloring and transitory expression have no ideal because Nature has proposed to herself nothing definite in them."² "Mere coloring and transitory expression" have of course become for many of our modern schools of poetry and painting the whole of beauty; but for Lessing, as for the classicist in general, beauty does not consist primarily in expression, but in a certain informing symmetry and proportion that, like true plot in tragedy, points the way to some human end. How far Lessing is, not only from our modern use of the

¹ *Laokoon*, ed. Blümner, 469 (Nachlass D).

² *Ibid.*, 399 (Nachlass A).

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word beauty, but also from our use of the word ideal, will appear from another passage.

"The highest bodily beauty," says Lessing, "exists only in man, and even in him only by virtue of the ideal.

"This ideal already finds less scope in the beasts, and in the world of plants and inanimate objects has no place at all.

"We can infer from this the rank of the flower and landscape painter. He imitates beauties that are capable of no ideal. He works therefore simply with his eye and hand; and genius has little or no share in what he does."¹

Lessing goes on to say that even so he prefers the landscape painter to the historical painter who does not direct his main purpose toward beauty but is willing to display his cleverness in mere expression without subordinating this expression to beauty.

Such a view of the ideal and of beauty would evidently not allow a high rank to the imitators of Thomson's "Seasons," even if they had been successful in painting their poetical landscapes; and

¹ Blümner, 440 (Nachlass C).

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Lessing would not admit that they had. He is as willing as any critic of the Renaissance to grant that poetry is a painting and an imitation, but this is as far as he is willing to carry *ut pictura poesis*. He is not willing to take the next step, and establish a formal resemblance between words and figures of speech in poetry and colors in painting. In fact, Lessing has done little more than develop the lines of La Fontaine:—

Les mots et les couleurs ne sont choses pareilles
Ni les yeux ne sont les oreilles.

There had grown up during the neo-classic period a formal confusion of poetry and painting; Lessing proposes to show that they are formally distinct. In his own words:—

“Both are arts of imitation and have all the rules in common which follow from the conception of imitation. Only they use quite different means for their imitation, and from this difference the special rules for each art take their rise.”¹

He has indeed struck the keynote of his book on the very title-page, in the motto from Plutarch: “They [i. e., painting and poetry] differ both in the

¹ Blümner, 353, 354 (Nachlass A).

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material and modes of their imitation." Now the material with which the poet works is words, and words necessarily follow one another in time ; any one who would paint directly with words some visible object is forced to enumerate one after the other the different parts of it, and a blurred and confused image must necessarily result from this piecemeal enumeration of details, from this attempt to render the coexistent by means of the successive. What the poet can really paint is actions, and in rendering anything that is not action he should strive to translate it into terms of action. Thus Homer does not try to paint directly the beauty of Helen, but puts the beauty of Helen in action, and shows its effect upon the old men on the wall at Troy. In contrast to Homer, Ariosto devotes whole stanzas to describing feature by feature the charms of Alcina, but all these descriptive details do not coalesce for us into the distinct image of a living woman ; and the lines in this description that are most successful are the ones that contain an element of action.

All the details with which the poet can deal only disconnectedly, the painter can render as they actu-

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ally coexist in space. The painter's limitation appears when he tries to paint action ; his art has at its command but a single moment ; if he attempts to paint two moments of an action, he is guilty of bad painting ; if again he tries to tell a story or indulge in literary intentions through the use of allegory, he falls into an obscurity that corresponds to the blurred and confused image of the poetical word-painter. The moment, then, is all-important for the plastic artist ; as Lessing puts it, he must select "the most pregnant moment," — the one that throws the most light on the past stages of the action and points the way most clearly to what is still to come. At this point Lessing seems to relax the objective rigor of his method and to consider painting not merely in its outer means of realization, but in its effects upon the imagination.

"The only fruitful moment is the one that allows the imagination free scope. The longer we gaze, the more must our imagination add ; and the more our imagination adds, the more we must believe we see. In the whole course of an emotion there is no moment which possesses this advantage so little as its highest stage. There is nothing beyond this ; and

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the presentation of extremes to the eye clips the wings of Fancy, prevents her from soaring beyond the impressions of the senses, and compels her to occupy herself with weaker images," etc.¹

In other words, the painter is confined by the limits of his art to one moment of an action, but can suggest other moments; and his ambition should be to select the moment that has the most of this suggestiveness. Though objectively limited to images, he can set the spectator to dreaming of motion and action.

Lessing can scarcely be said to have developed adequately the converse doctrine that, though the poet is objectively limited to the painting of motion and action, he can act suggestively upon the reader and set him to dreaming of images.² Lessing is so humanistic that even in the sort of waking dream that is the illusion of true art, he would have us dream of action. Perhaps, indeed, it is misleading to apply to Lessing at all such words as dreaming and suggestiveness. He does not for example concern him-

¹ Blümner, 165 (III).

² The clearest allusion to this dreaming of images in the *Laokoön* is in xiv and the note at the very end (Blümner, 247, 248).

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self sufficiently, to our modern thinking, with the suggestiveness of words. He looks on them too much as a sort of passive material, and on the poet as too conscious and deliberate in his combining of them. We are more inclined to dwell on the mystery and magic that words may acquire at the touch of a true poet; on the almost hypnotic spell they may be made to cast over our feelings:—

All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word.

In thus tending to dissociate language from emotion, to allow insufficiently for the unconscious and the spontaneous, in short, to treat art too analytically, Lessing has points of contact with the very school he assailed. His ambition was simply to oppose a true analysis to the false analysis of the pseudo-classic critics. The main result of this analysis—the great central generalization of the “Laokoon,” that poetry deals with temporal, painting with spatial relations, poetry with the successive and painting with the coexistent—will not, as I have already said, seem extremely original to one who is familiar with the previous literature of the subject. In his introduction Blümner gives a list of

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the writers who furnished hints to Lessing, and in some cases partly anticipated him. Long as this list is, it is not, as I can testify from my own reading, complete. For example, Blümner says nothing of a passage from Caylus in which the Count comes very near to making Lessing's main distinction.¹ This distinction, indeed, forced itself even on some of those who were trying hardest to confuse the arts according to the pseudo-classic formula. I find a remarkable example of this fact in a writer whom Blümner has also failed to mention, Father Castel. As is well known, the "Laokoon" in its present form is only a fragment, — one of three parts Lessing had planned to write. In the third part he had intended to discuss the arts of music and dancing. We can only infer his ideas on these arts from his few scattered memoranda for this uncompleted portion of his work; but in his treatment of music, as in that of poetry and painting, he would evidently have been chiefly interested in establishing boundaries and frontiers. We may judge from his reference to the Kapellmeister Telemann that he was no friend of musical painting, that he would

¹ This passage is quoted in Rocheblave, *op. cit.*, pp. 218 f.

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have condemned any mixing up of the domain of sound with that of color and vision.

Now no one was more celebrated in the eighteenth century for confusions of this kind than Father Castel. One finds constant allusion in the literature of the period to his *clavecin des couleurs* or *clavecin oculaire*,—in other words, a sort of instrument he had constructed to make sound visible and interpret it in terms of color. Father Castel set forth the theory of his color-clavichord in the “*Mercure*” of November, 1725. He completed the first model of the new instrument, as he tells us, on December 21, 1734. He says that he had been put on the track of his discovery by something he had read in the “*Musurgia*” of Kircher.¹ “If at the time of a fine concert,” writes Kircher, “we could see the air stirred by all the vibrations communicated to it by the voices and instruments, we should be surprised to see it filled with the liveliest and most finely blended colors.”² It was Castel’s ambition to make

¹ Athanasius Kircher (1602–80) was a German Jesuit. His *Musurgia universalis, sive ars magna consoni et dissoni* appeared in 1650.

² See *Esprit, Saillies et singularités du P. Castel* (1763), p. 280. Castel was born in 1688 and died in 1757.

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these analogical colors visible ; to arrange a series of colors in the same harmonic proportions as sounds ; to connect them with a key-board in such wise that, when the fingers touched certain keys, the colors should appear ordered and combined in the same way as the sounds of the musical notes corresponding to these keys. But what colors are equivalent to what notes ? "The green," answers Father Castel, "corresponds to *re*, and will doubtless make them [the audience] feel that this note *re* is natural, rural, sprightly, pastoral. Red, which corresponds to *sol*, will give them the idea of a warlike note, bloody, angry, terrible. Blue, corresponding to *do*, will give them the impression of a note that is noble, majestic, celestial, divine, etc.¹ The deaf in this way will be able to see the music of the ears, the blind to hear the music of the eyes, and those who have eyes as well as ears will enjoy each kind of music better by enjoying both."²

¹ Father Castel may have had a touch of color-audition to help on his pseudo-classic theorizing. Cf. the sonnet of Arthur Rimbaud I refer to later (p. 183).

² *Op. cit.*, p. 329. Father Castel is probably indebted for his theories, not only to Kircher, but to Newton (see *Optics*, Book I, Pt. II, Propositions 3 and 6). A discussion of the whole subject

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But Father Castel is not satisfied with colors merely arranged in a diatonic series, and appearing and disappearing rapidly at the touch of a key-board in imitation of musical notes. He would like to give more permanency to his color concerts, to arrive, as he says, at a still easier means of "painting music and sounds," and he proceeds to work out a scheme for what he calls "musical and harmonic tapestries." "Can you imagine," he asks, "what a room will be, the walls of which are hung with rigadoons and minuets, with sarabands and passacaglias, with cantatas and sonatas, and even, if you please, with a very complete representation of all the music of an opera?"¹ When painting has thus succeeded in reproducing analogically all the harmonic effects of music, there will be more reason than heretofore, says Castel, giving a slight twist to Simonides, for calling it a dumb music; "but a music all the more will be found in Erasmus Darwin's *Loves of the Plants* (Interlude to Canto II). Darwin considers the possibility of improving on Castel, and concludes that "if visible music can be agreeably produced, it would be more easy to add sentiment to it by the representations of groves and Cupids and sleeping nymphs amid the changing colors, than is commonly done by the words of audible music."

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

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effective," he adds, "in that it will steal its way into the heart with less noise and tumult." ¹ Father Castel would evidently have agreed with Keats, that "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

Not content with confusing sound and color Father Castel meditated still other confusions. Thus he gives a recipe for constructing a *clavecin des odeurs*: by striking a key-board one could open and shut the vents of a row of scent-boxes arranged in a sort of diatonic series, and so play concerts of perfumes.² The ideas of Castel, indeed, are the *reductio ad absurdum* of certain pseudo-classical tendencies: for it will be observed that he does not confuse the arts subjectively, but objectively and formally in their means of realization; and in attempting this outer and formal confusion he was led curiously enough to anticipate Lessing. "One difference between color and sound," he says, "had kept him in a state of uncertainty for the past twelve or thirteen years as to the completeness of the analogy," which he had been trying all that time to establish between them: colors were fixed in space and sounds were fugitive in time; and on several occasions he states the difficulty

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 313.

² *Ibid.*, p. 369.

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almost as forcibly as Lessing.¹ But though this doubt as to the truth of his analogy tormented Father Castel, it did not deter him from riding his hobbies and making of himself a target for the mockeries of Voltaire.

Father Castel is the kind of figure that usually appears toward the very end of a literary movement. His color-clavichord is as symptomatic in this respect as the mouth-organ of Des Esseintes that we shall discuss in a later chapter. Only Castel marks the supreme exaggerations of the pseudo-classic, Des Esseintes of the romantic point of view. With this mention of Castel we may therefore terminate appropriately our very incomplete survey of the pseudo-classical confusion of the arts.²

¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 294: "Les couleurs suivent l'étendue des lieux; les lieux sont fixes et permanents; mais les sons suivent l'étendue des temps; or les temps sont essentiellement successifs et inaliénables."

² If I were attempting a complete survey, I should need to take a glance at certain aspects of the baroque and rococo styles, etc. A wider survey of this kind would furnish fresh illustrations of the pseudo-classic tendency to confuse the arts formally and objectively (usually in terms of painting). The man who did more than any one else to confound the standards of painting with those of sculpture and architecture was of course Bernini. Lessing reacted so far in the opposite direction that he has been justly accused of carrying the standards of sculpture into painting.

PART II

THE ROMANTIC CONFUSION OF
THE ARTS

CHAPTER IV

THE THEORY OF SPONTANEITY

WE have seen the rôle that was played during the neo-classical period by Horace's comparison between poetry and painting, or the equivalent one of Simonides. The saying that really bears the same relation to the modern period that the Horatian simile does to the neo-classical — though it has had less actual vogue — is that of Friedrich Schlegel: Architecture is frozen music.¹ *Ut pictura poesis* had been taken by the neo-classicists to mean that the common bond² of the arts of which Cicero speaks is purely formal. Friedrich Schlegel, on the other hand, representing the romanticists, would seek for this *commune*

¹ The authorship of this phrase does not seem quite certain. The chief claimants to it besides F. Schlegel are Schelling and Görres. See Büchmann's *Geflügelte Worte* (23 Aufl., 1907), pp. 356, 357. The idea of the phrase is of course contained in the passage I quote later (p. 124) from A. W. Schlegel.

² "Omnes artes quæ ad humanitatem pertinent, habent quoddam commune vinculum, et quasi cognatione quadam inter se continentur." *Pro Archia Poeta*. This passage is taken by Spence as motto for his *Polymetis*.

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vinculum not in form, but in feeling : even architecture, apparently the most formal of the arts, arose originally in response to a rhythmic thrill ; is, in short, only congealed emotion. Long before Walter Pater, the Germans declared that music is the most artistic of the arts because it is the least formal ; that the other arts tend toward their perfection in proportion as they approximate to music.

Now, just as we have found that all the neo-classic comparing and confusing of poetry and painting is only a corollary of something still more fundamental, namely, the doctrine of imitation, so the exaltation of music is only a corollary of something still more fundamental in romanticism, namely, the theory of spontaneity. By making the arts purely imitative the neo-classicist had reduced the rôle of the spontaneous, the unexpected, the original. He aimed to bring everything so far as possible under the control of the cold and deliberate understanding, to the neglect of all that is either above or below a certain rational level, — the sense of awe and mystery as well as the sense of wonder. He would have everything logical, conventionally correct, dryly didactic, able to give a clear account of itself when

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tested by the standards of common sense and ordinary fact. By his unwillingness to allow for the unconscious and the unpremeditated, he tended to identify art with the artificial, and to turn the divine illusion of poetry into a sort of elegant falsehood.

This is, of course, an extreme statement of the neo-classic point of view. Not even a Chapelain or a Rymer or a Gottsched would realize it in every particular. Then, too, we should not forget the influences that, during the neo-classical period itself, were making against a pure formalism: for example, Boileau and his rendering of Longinus, and the growing emphasis from this time forth on the personal and emotional factor, — the rise, in short, of a school of taste. A closely allied influence was that of women and the drawing-rooms, and their recognition, if not of the spontaneous, at least of the undefinable element in artistic creation, of the *je ne sais quoi*, as they were fond of calling it. We must also remember that the tendency to submit everything to the hard and dry light of the understanding is by no means a purely neo-classic phenomenon. There were various other contributing causes to the so-called period of enlightenment

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(*Aufklärung*): for example, the philosophy of Descartes and the developments it received in Germany in the systems of Leibnitz and Christian Wolf.

Whatever the explanation, few will deny that the early eighteenth century had arrived at an over-analytical dryness of mind, and so combined it with social convention as to repress a number of very natural human instincts. According to some modern psychologists, when an essential side of human nature is thus denied and starved, it is not eliminated entirely, but merely forced into the subconscious; and when it has there accumulated for a certain time, it makes its way back to the surface in a sort of "subliminal uprush." In an epoch of convention and dry rationality there finally arises, in the words of Matthew Arnold, the need of "storms, passion, effusion, and relief." We can follow the gradual accumulation of such emotional elements beneath the surface of the eighteenth century as well as the subliminal uprush or overflow of emotion at the end, — an overflow that assumed forms as different as the German Storm and Stress, the Wesleyan movement in England, and the French Revolution.

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We inevitably think of Rousseau as the most important single figure in this emotional reaction, as the great apostle of the original and the spontaneous. That such a reaction would have taken place without Rousseau is certain; but it is equally certain that he first gave powerful expression to it and profoundly influenced the forms that it assumed. "The root of the whole Storm and Stress movement in Germany," says Hettner, "is Rousseau's gospel of Nature." A. W. Schlegel and Madame de Staël do little more than repeat Rousseau in their onslaughts on the imitative and conventional.¹ Wordsworth has given merely one special application to Rousseau's message, in his dictum that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Schelling attacks systematically the whole theory of imitation² as we have outlined it in the first part of this book; and this was very fitting in a philosopher who, according to a German authority, set out to romanticize

¹ Cf., for example, the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 2^e partie, lettres xiv-xvii, with *De l'Allemagne*, 1^{re} partie, and with A. W. Schlegel's *Dramatic Art and Literature*, *passim*.

² Schelling opposed the idea of creative spontaneity to that of mechanical imitation in his *Über das Verhältniss der bildenden Künste zur Natur* (1807), an address that was influential on Coleridge.

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the whole universe ; but Rousseau had romanticized the universe before him.

Neo-classicism as it developed in France might be defined as a mixture of Aristotle and the dancing-master, — Aristotle being more in evidence at the beginning of the movement and the dancing-master at the end. At first sight Rousseau seems to have a quarrel with the dancing-master rather than with Aristotle, to be more concerned with getting rid of social than of literary conventions. To the tyranny of etiquette and the artificiality of the drawing-rooms he opposes a world of freshness, naturalness, spontaneity. "I was so tired," he writes, "of fine rooms, fountains, artificial groves and flower beds, and the still more tiresome people who displayed all these ; I was so worn out with pamphlets, card-playing, music, silly jokes, insipid mincing airs, great suppers, that whenever I spied a poor hawthorn copse, a hedge, a farmstead, a meadow, or in passing through a hamlet snuffed the odor of a good chervil omelette, or heard from a distance the rude refrain of the shepherd's songs, I used to wish at the devil the whole tale of rouge and furbelows." ¹

¹ *Confessions*, livre ix (1756).

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This first appearance is, however, somewhat misleading. Rousseau's deeper quarrel is, after all, not with the dancing-master, but with Aristotle, especially if Aristotle be taken to typify not merely the tyranny of classical imitation, but in general the logical and analytical attitude toward life. Man, says Rousseau, should not reason or analyze but feel (*sentio ergo sum*). The activity of the intellect, indeed, so far from being a gain, is a source of degeneracy. The intellect has divided man against himself, destroyed the unity of instinct, the freshness and spontaneity that primitive man enjoyed and that the child continues to enjoy. Rousseau is an obscurantist of a new species. He sees in man's eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge the cause of his fall from Nature, much as the theologian sees in the same event the cause of his fall from God. With him begins that revulsion from the rational, the attack on the analytical understanding, on the "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions," which pervades the whole romantic movement. If we would find our way back to the Arcadia of fresh and spontaneous feeling, we should cease to think. "The man who thinks," says

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Rousseau, "is a depraved animal"; a saying parallel in its way to that of Gregory: "Ignorance is the mother of devotion."

We are especially urged by Rousseau in dealing with art and literature to get rid of our "meddling intellects." Like Sterne, he is for the man who is "pleased he knows not why and cares not wherefore." "The Frenchman," Rousseau complains, "does not seek on the stage naturalness and illusion, but only wit and thoughts; he does not ask to be enchanted by a play." ¹ *Il ne se soucie pas d'être séduit*, — the whole of the modern programme is implied in that brief phrase. The seductiveness of artistic creation, or, as we should say nowadays, its power of suggestion, was Rousseau's sole concern. If art can enthral him, he is willing to waive all question of logic or rationality. His first question about anything was not whether it was "probable," or rather he gave to the word an entirely different meaning. "When my imagination has once caught fire at an object," he says, "the wildest and most childish schemes I devise in order to attain it seem probable to me." In short, the only logic he asks

¹ *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 2^e partie, lettre xvii.

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from literature or from life itself is the logic of dream-land.

Rousseau remarks that no one's conduct and points of view ever derived more completely than his from temperament alone; and he was conscious of the contrast between his own temperament and that of his contemporaries. The sense of uniqueness and singularity that he acquired by comparing himself with them was for him a source of pride, and at the same time, so far as it forced him into solitude, a source of suffering. "As for the French," says Goethe, thinking especially of the French of the neo-classical period, "they will always be arrested by their reason. They do not admit that the imagination has its own laws, which can be and must be independent of the reason." In a way, the French had recognized the imagination, but only as being, in Pascal's words, "a proud power hostile to reason." If neo-classical theory did not especially favor the imagination, Cartesian theory positively discountenanced it, on the ground that by its illusions it lured man away from reason and reality. It was somewhat in this spirit that Father Malebranche made his famous attack on the imagination.

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Now Rousseau is like Malebranche in at least one respect: he accepts the natural opposition between imagination and reason, only he is willing to forego reason if he can but attain imaginative illusion. "Divine aberrations of the reason," Rousseau exclaims, "a thousand times more glorious than the reason itself!"¹ His ambition is to escape from reality into a world of dreams, the only world as he tells us that is fit for habitation.² Of course he often reasons brilliantly in his effort to discredit the reason, just as Malebranche, according to Voltaire, is brilliantly imaginative in his attack on the imagination. As a result of Rousseau's readiness to exalt spontaneity even at the expense of rationality, his whole theory of the imagination has a hectic flush. He tells us how he composed — but of course failed to jot down — some of his best music while lying ill of fever, and regrets that record cannot be kept of the sublime imaginings of delirium.³ A contemporary says that Rousseau did his best writing only when in a state of fever; and Rousseau himself speaks of

¹ *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 2^e partie, lettre ii.

² "Le pays des chimères est en ce monde le seul digne d'être habité," etc. *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 6^e partie, lettre viii.

³ *Confessions*, livre vii.

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the period of composition of his greatest books as "ten years of fever and delirium."¹ The frequency with which Rousseau uses the word delirium in speaking of his own imaginative activity suggests the phrase that was applied to his literary descendants, the French romanticists, — *les amateurs du délire*. The Cartesians were for having no imagination at all, the Rousseauists will be satisfied with nothing short of a frenzy of the imagination. The neo-classicists were for confining the poetical faculties in a strait-jacket of rules; it is hard to read certain romantic poets, Victor Hugo for example, without at times regretting the absence of the strait-jacket. The neo-classicists, by admitting only what is probable to the understanding, reduced unduly the rôle of illusion, the element of wonder and surprise.

On the other hand, the romanticists too often achieved their renascence of wonder by an extinction of common sense. They were too prone to think with Professor Saintsbury that when good sense comes in at the door, poetry and imagination fly out at the window. This is simply the neo-classical view turned upside-down or inside-out;

¹ *Premier Dialogue*.

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and, as Sainte-Beuve remarks, nothing resembles a hollow so much as a swelling.

We can afford to linger over this relation between the imaginative and the rational, or, as the Aristotelian theorist would have said, between the wonderful and the probable, for it lies at the very centre of any right distinction between classic and romantic art. The difference is fundamental between the man who looks primarily for rationality and strict causal connection in what he reads, and the man who seeks primarily for adventure and surprise. The man who is too slow in granting that willing suspension of disbelief which, according to Coleridge, constitutes poetic faith; who clings too rigidly to his rational standards and keeps harping on probability in this sense, may justly be suspected of a lack of imagination. This, for example, is the fault with Rymer when he complains of Spenser that "blindly rambling on marvelous adventures he makes no conscience of probability. All is fanciful and chimerical, without any uniformity, without any foundation in truth; his poem is perfect fairyland."¹

There is the opposite case of the man who yields

¹ Preface to *Rapin*.

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his poetic faith too readily, who does not balk at any improbability. This is evidently true of children or child-like individuals. There is, however, a carelessness of rationality and a love of the marvelous that, instead of being child-like, is a symptom rather of over-refinement. Such a difference, for example, we feel between the author of a genuine old Irish saga and some modern Celtic revivalist. In the one we have to do with a really naïve person speaking to a naïve age ; in the other, with an æsthete who is simply isolating himself in his tower of ivory. In a late Latin writer like Apuleius, again, we see the nexus of cause and effect giving way to a series of somewhat childish surprises. The decadent Greeks, as Lucian complains, yielded to a somewhat similar spirit, so as to efface the firm lines between the different literary *genres*. In short, a renascence of wonder, if not necessarily a sign of decadence, is in any case an ambiguous event. The question must always remain whether it stands for a poetical gain or a loss of rationality ; whether it is a mark of imaginative vigor or of a debilitated intellect. The probable, says Boileau, is a great enemy of the wonderful ; and so indeed it

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is. To be prosaic and sensible, and at the same time unimaginative, like many neo-classicists, is comparatively easy; to launch forth into a world of pure imaginative illusion, like so many of our modern romanticists, is also not extremely difficult; but to show one's self a true humanist, that is, to mediate between these extremes and occupy all the space between them; to be probable or convincing to both the imagination and the understanding; to satisfy the standards of poetry without offending the standards of prose,—this is a miracle that has been achieved only by the great poets.

Even the most hardened of the neo-classic critics recognized, at least in theory, the need of an element of wonder in creative art; but in general the men of the Middle Ages seemed to them to have enjoyed their wonder on too easy terms. The adventures and surprises with which the mediæval romances are filled were not sufficiently linked together “according to probability or necessity.” This use of the idea of probability as a weapon of attack against mediæval romance is common in the critical treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The following from Father Mambrun's treatise on the Epic

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(page 173) may serve as a sample: "I remember, when I was a boy, reading in a book called 'Francus Sagittarius' how Zerbinus fell in love with the maiden Florizel, and, having lost all hope of winning her, threw himself headlong into the sea. The nereids, taken by the beauty of the youth, receive him lovingly; but he refuses to yield to their blandishments, and they, incensed, cast him out into the middle of the waves. At that very moment Queen Florizel happened to be walking on the shore. It happened moreover that fishermen caught Zerbinus in their net and laid him out on the shore, thinking him a fish. Wonderful to relate, Zerbinus gradually comes to, spitting out the water, and not knowing whether he is alive and in his senses, or whether he is still in the waves or in the palace of the nereids; and speaks many things lovingly about Florizel in her very presence."

Here are stirring adventures indeed, Father Mamburn concludes, but lacking as they do in probability, they are worthy, not of serious poetry, but only of old wives' tales (*fabellis anilibus*); as Rymer would say, they have a "tang of the old woman." But in matters of this kind there is evidently a

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much more delicate and difficult adjustment than Mambrun suspects between a dull fidelity to logic and imaginative illusion. He is evidently capable of a logical but not of a poetic faith. The adventures he rejects would have seemed less improbable to a true poet, — for example, to the author of “Endymion.” The end, says Aristotle, is the chief thing of all ; but Keats’s interest is not so much in the end as in the incidents and delights of the journey. He cares little for the logical linking up of his story, if only it afford him an opportunity to travel in the realms of gold. Poetry thus understood is less a progress toward a specific goal than a somewhat disconnected series of beautiful words and beautiful moments ; and this, of course, is to fall into an opposite excess from that of a Mambrun or a Rymer, but an excess more in accord perhaps with the ordinary instincts of human nature. For human nature, impatient at best of the discipline of a definite purpose, is ever eager to be off on its “adventure brave and new.”

“Nothing is beautiful but the truth,” says Boileau ; “the truth alone is lovely.” One might urge at least as plausibly that it is easier to appeal to

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most men by the loveliness of error, — as Erasmus has in fact done in his wise book, “The Praise of Folly.” Boileau’s more poetical contemporary, La Fontaine, in the course of a delightful account of the creative imagination, says of man’s power to enchant himself with his own dreams : —

L’homme est de glace aux vérités,

Il est de feu pour les mensonges.

Neo-classical theory recognized in a way this insatiable appetite of man for illusions, that he is hungry not for fact but for fiction ; only it would have the fiction doled out to him under the supervision of the cold and calculating understanding. As appears so clearly in the theory of the three unities, it conceived of the creative artist not as a magician but as a deliberate deceiver, as one whose business it is to cheat the intellect rather than to enchant the imagination.¹

Literary movements often remind one of the law of physics, — action and reaction are equal and in opposite directions. The neo-classicist tried to im-

¹ Cf. for the corresponding idea in painting, Batteux, *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (p. 258) : “A quoi se réduisent toutes les règles de la peinture ? à tromper les yeux par la ressemblance, à nous faire croire que l’objet est réel, tandis que ce n’est qu’une image. Cela est évident.”

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pose the standards of prose upon poetry, Rousseau and the romanticists carried the standards of poetry into prose. The neo-classicist desired logic and reality without illusion, the romanticist would have illusion without reality. Rousseau wished to banish "rule and pale forethought" not only from literature but from life. When a youth at Turin, he tells us, he had an excellent position in the household of the Count de Gouvon, a position that would have led him by assured stages to an honorable future. But all this savored for him too much of cause and effect; or, as he puts it, he "saw no adventures in it all," and so "not without difficulty" he got himself discharged, and wandered off one fine morning, in order that he might taste with his friend Bâcle the joys of vagabondage.

Later, at the Hermitage, he relates that he was rude to visitors who recalled him to earth at the moment when he was on the point of "setting out for the world of enchantment" (*partir pour le monde enchanté*). "The impossibility of attaining to real objects cast me into the land of dreams (*le pays des chimères*), and seeing no actual object worthy of my delirium I nourished it in an ideal world that my

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creative imagination had soon peopled with beings according to my heart.”¹ The creative imagination is thus for Rousseau a means of escape into a land of heart’s desire, a world of sheer unreality. Rousseau would have sympathized with that ancient, who, as Horace narrates, had the gift of witnessing gorgeous spectacles in an empty theatre, and who, when restored to his senses by copious doses of hellebore, cried out to his officious friends that they had undone him and not saved him by thus bringing him back to a dull reality and robbing him of his delightful dreams. This ancient was, indeed, merely a romanticist born out of due season. Does not Keats in his tale pronounce his curse, not upon the snake-woman, but upon “the sage, old Apollonius,” the type of a hateful rationality that dispelled the magic vision (*mentis gratissimus error*) and

made

The tender-personed Lamia melt into a shade?

The romanticist is ready to fly into the arms even of a false enchantress rather than submit to “cold philosophy.” Any vision, though it be the vision of

¹ *Confessions*, 2^e partie, livre ix (1756).

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vertigo, or delirium, or intoxication, the mere fumes of opium or alcohol, is to be courted if only it bring oblivion of prose.

Voltaire says that imagination is not to be esteemed when it is divorced from rationality and judgment. For example, fairy tales are immensely imaginative, yet we despise them because of their lack of "order and good-sense." Not many years later Novalis proclaimed fairy tales to be the highest form of art just because they lacked logical coherency, and converted the world into a "magic dream-picture, a musical fantasy." ¹ In thus sacrificing the probable so completely to the wonderful, the romanticist is naturally led to exalt childhood. Dr. Johnson says that wonder is "a pause of reason." But for the child it is not even a pause of reason since reason can scarcely be said to have begun. Wherever children are, says Novalis, there is the golden age. For the child, life is still an adventure, a succession of beautiful moments each independent of the last, a series of ever fresh surprises ; childhood

¹ R. Haym has brought together and discussed the utterances of Novalis on this subject (*Die romantische Schule*, p. 378).

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is the age of unreflective happiness, of vivid and spontaneous sensation, —

the hour

Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower.

The romanticist, we must admit, is often happily inspired by this poetry of childhood. Rousseau was not only before everything else an apostle of spontaneity, but, unlike many other apostles, he actually achieved what he preached. Some of the pages in which he celebrates his escape from artificiality and the “meddling intellect,” and describes his Arcadian revery close to the bosom of Nature, have still an incomparable freshness and charm. No verses again are more inevitable than those of Wordsworth at his best. “Nature,” as Matthew Arnold says, “seems to take the pen out of his hand and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power.” Some of the shorter poems of Blake, to take another example almost at random, are admirable for a naïve and childlike wonder. At the same time we cannot scrutinize too closely this craving for a renascence of wonder; for as I have already said, instead of being a sign of real naturalness and simplicity, it often marks the last stage of over-refinement. Walt Whit-

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man, for instance, so far from being the poet of natural and simple people, is rather the poet of the over-civilized. The more one considers the question, indeed, the wider appears the gap between the primitivism of the Rousseauist and the genuinely primitive traits that reveal themselves in the childhood of either the individual or the race. Romantic primitivism is the source of our modern confusion of the arts, as well as of many other confusions, and so we shall need to consider certain aspects of it carefully, though without any attempt to be exhaustive.

In the first place the child is not self-conscious. The romanticist on the contrary, though willing to purchase his renascence of wonder by an eclipse of reason, finds that the reason often refuses to be eclipsed in spite of his efforts to drug and narcotize it. It looks down mockingly on the part of the self that is trying to become naïve and primitive, and there arises that conflict of the head and the heart that assumes so many forms in the romantic movement from Rousseau down, one form being the self-parody of so-called romantic irony. Romantic irony will, of course, be at its maximum in a writer like

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Heine, who is at once intensely sentimental and keenly intellectual. Childhood moreover is the period of play, and so the romanticists proclaimed that art and literature should not accept the discipline of a definite purpose but should also be merely forms of play.¹ But the romantic primitivist is curiously different in his ways of playing from the genuine child. Children's games have rules, some of them in fact being about as highly regulated as seventeenth-century tragedy. By observing these outer forms children do homage in their way to the god Terminus. Children and savages indeed are in many respects the most conventional of beings. The romantic primitivist on the other hand is inspired above all by the desire to escape from the conventional. In dealing with the arts and literature especially he would discard all the old formal distinctions, and then instead of seeking for a higher discipline would rest in the delightful sense of having got rid of all boundaries and limitations whatsoever.

¹ The most important expression of the play theory of art is found in Schiller's *Æsthetic Letters*, a work written under the combined influence of Rousseau and Kant and of Rousseau through Kant.

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“It is the beginning of all poetry,” says Friedrich Schlegel, “to abolish the laws and method of the rationally proceeding reason, and to plunge us once more into the ravishing confusions of fantasy, the original chaos of human nature.” Things are no longer seen analytically, “in disconnection dead and spiritless,” but in a sort of emotional unity, where everything is so bound together that when one sense receives a vivid impression the other senses thrill sympathetically; where all frontiers vanish away and all firm outlines melt together in vague and voluptuous revery. Let us listen once more to Novalis, who, it will be remembered, set up the fairy tale as the canon of art: “One can imagine tales without more coherence than the different stages of a dream, poems which are melodious and full of beautiful words but destitute of meaning or connection; at most comprehensible stanzas here and there, like fragments of perfectly unrelated things. This true poetry can of course have only a symbolical significance and an indirect effect like music.” This passage does not describe the kind of art that will ever appeal to any normal child; it does describe remarkably what many nineteenth-century

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artists, from Novalis himself down to the French symbolists, have actually attempted.

This type of art may be defined as illusion for the sake of illusion, a mere *Nepenthe* of the spirit, a means not of becoming reconciled to reality but of escaping from it. Yet many of the writers and artists who thus take flight into a *pays des chimères* would at the same time pose as mystics or Platonic idealists. In fact, it is almost normal for the romanticist, on breaking away from the authority of Aristotle and the neo-classical rules, to put himself under the patronage of Plato. For example, A. W. Schlegel sets out to show how very much "the anatomical ideas which have been stamped as rules are below the essential requisites of poetry"; how, permitting as they do of an appeal to the understanding only, they have entirely missed the nature of true poetical illusion; and Schlegel gives what is in many respects an admirable account of this true illusion. "It is," he says, "a waking dream to which we voluntarily surrender ourselves." He then proceeds to score both Aristotle and Lessing for not having done justice to this emotional factor in art, for having been analytical where they should have been

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imaginative, and adds: "Were I to select a guide from among the ancient philosophers it should undoubtedly be Plato, who acquired the idea of the beautiful, not by dissection which can never give it, but by intuitive inspiration,"¹ etc. The passage is typical. We are, in fact, forced to inquire whether the romantic writers were true Platonists, just as we were led to inquire whether the neo-classic writers were true Aristotelians. This inquiry is essential to our subject and deserves to be treated in a separate chapter.

¹ *Dramatic Art and Literature*, Lecture xvii. Schlegel had a rather unexpected predecessor in his ideas about true illusion — Dr. Johnson (in his Preface to Shakespeare). Schlegel makes proper acknowledgment to Johnson (p. 249, Bohn translation).

CHAPTER V

PLATONISTS AND PSEUDO-PLATONISTS

“EVERY man,” says Coleridge, “is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist.” In an important sense this saying is true, though actual human nature is of course not quite so simple. In the first place, there are the many persons whom it would be an extravagant compliment to call either Platonists or Aristotelians ; who are, in Carlylean phrase, merely patent digesters. Then there are the pseudo-Aristotelians of whom we have already spoken, as well as the pseudo-Platonists of whom we shall speak presently, not to mention the mixed and intermediary types, or the ways in which the same man may shift from one point of view to the other according to the mood and the moment. Plato himself was not a Platonist in the meaning that is often given to the term, nor was Aristotle an Aristotelian ; that is, Plato was not merely a sublime enthusiast, any more than Aristotle was content with a dry analysis. Plato and Aristotle were like other sensible

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people who, whatever they may have been "born," try to maintain some balance between the analytic and the synthetic elements in their thinking.

Yet when Plato is most analytic and Aristotle most synthetic, we still feel the difference of temper; so that Aristotle and Plato may rightly be taken after all as the supreme examples respectively of the analytic and the synthetic minds. We have therefore been justified in calling certain confusions that arose from a false analysis during the neo-classical period pseudo-Aristotelian; we shall also be justified in calling pseudo-Platonic certain other confusions which have arisen from a false synthesis and which pervade not merely modern art and literature, but modern life.

The taking in vain of the name of Plato is of course nothing new. For example, many of the Petrarchists of the Renaissance were as fond of posing as Platonists as any modern romanticist, — and with about as much reason. We cannot attempt a complete study of so vast a subject as the difference between true and false Platonism. We must confine ourselves to the main distinctions that are necessary for the present subject, and these distinc-

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tions may perhaps best be reached by comparing Plato with Rousseau, the most representative figure in European romanticism. There is a certain superficial likeness between the two men: each lived in an intensely self-conscious age, when analysis was dissolving traditional standards and threatening as it seemed the very foundations of conduct. Rousseau attacked the *philosophes* about as Plato attacked the sophists. They both look with suspicion on literature and the theatre, and they both oppose to the corruption of their time a sort of ideal Sparta. But if there is some agreement in their diagnosis of the diseases of an advanced civilization, there is none at all in their remedies. Rousseau strolls off into the forest of Saint-Germain, and indulges in a dream of the golden age which he then asserts to be a true vision of the life of primitive man, — man still at one with himself and his fellows, before he had lost his ignorance, before the growth of intellect had weakened the bond of sympathy and converted the peaceful selfishness tempered by “natural pity,” that one finds at the origin, into a warring egoism. He therefore looks back with nostalgic longing on the “state of nature” from which man has fallen,

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and with corresponding distrust on the faculties of the mind that have destroyed this spontaneity of instinct, weakened the bond of communal sympathy, and brought man into conflict with himself and others. He even raises the question whether a certain tribe on the Orinoco has not been wise in binding up the heads of the children in planks, thus arresting their intellectual development and assuring them some portion of their primitive felicity.

Plato on the contrary does not dream of any return to nature. He sees the luxury and egoism and self-indulgence that have come with the weakening of traditional standards, and sets out in search of inner standards to take the place of the outer standards that have been lost. Instead of getting rid of discipline, like Rousseau, and hoping to overcome selfishness by reverting to the pristine warmth of sympathy, Plato would press forward, using the intellectual faculties themselves as stepping-stones, to a higher discipline which leads in turn to a new sense of unity, a sense of unity that we may term, in opposition to Rousseau's unity of instinct, the unity of insight. Rousseau's view of life is above all emotional, that of Plato supremely disciplinary (indeed

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he may fairly be accused in a later work, like the "Laws," of overdoing the discipline). The unity of Plato is associated with a concentration of the will, that of Rousseau with an expansion of the feelings. A recent historian of Greek philosophy¹ remarks that Plato would not have understood the rôle Schopenhauer assigns to pity (Schopenhauer being in this respect a Rousseauist), and would utterly have despised the charms of sensibility as depicted by Rousseau. These remarks go far in establishing the difference between Rousseauists and Platonists, between those whose chief interest is in the things that are below the reason and those who are chiefly interested in the things that are above it.

The radical divergence of the two classes always appears in their attitude toward the intellectual faculties. Socrates, according to Rousseau, praises ignorance. Rousseau does not often indulge in such an unblushing sophism. What Socrates actually asserted, of course, was, that though men imagine they know something they are in reality ignorant. The American scientist who complained only the other day that nobody knows more than seven billionths of one

¹ See T. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers*, III, p. 116.

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per cent about anything, was merely echoing what Socrates said many centuries ago at Athens. But Socrates would have men cherish preciously this fraction of knowledge, however infinitesimal, and the faculties by which they have attained it, in the hope that they may ultimately add to it a few more billionths of a per cent. We can imagine with what irony he would have greeted any Wordsworthian or Rousseauistic talk about "the false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions." On the contrary he spent his whole life in multiplying distinctions, and may indeed be regarded as the founder of formal logic.

We have here a touchstone for separating not merely Platonists from pseudo-Platonists but also true from false mystics. For if some of our Rousseauists have posed as Platonists, others, as I have said, have looked on themselves as mystics. But the true mystic is not much given to mere revery ; it is a historic fact that he has often shown himself remarkably shrewd and practical ; and in any case he lives on good terms with his intellect. He is ready to follow it until it brings him to the point where he must intrust himself to a still higher power, — a moment

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Dante has symbolized in the passage of the "Purgatorio" where Virgil ceases to be his guide and gives way to Beatrice. If we find that a man attains his vision only by a denial of rationality, we may at once suspect that we are dealing with a pseudo-mystic. Professor Santayana writes: "In casting off with self-assurance and a sense of fresh vitality the distinctions of tradition and reason a man may feel, as he sinks back comfortably to a lower level of sense and instinct, that he is returning to Nature or escaping into the infinite. Mysticism makes us proud and happy to renounce the work of intelligence both in thought and in life, and persuades us that we become divine by remaining imperfectly human."¹ But this passage is not a description of the genuine mystic at all, but merely of the Rousseauist, and as such it is excellent.

Of course, things are not so clear-cut in concrete human nature as they are in our formulæ. The sense of what is above the reason sometimes merges bewilderingly into the sense of what is below the reason. There are, for example, touches of true mystical insight in Wordsworth, along with other pas-

¹ *Poetry and Religion*, p. 187.

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sages almost equally admirable as poetry, if not equally wise, but passages at any rate that are more Rousseauistic than Platonic. Thus the famous Ode is a curious blend of Plato and Rousseau, — of the Platonic doctrine of reminiscence of previous existence and the Rousseauistic reminiscence of childhood as the age of freshness and spontaneity. To the belief that “our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting” Plato would of course have assented; but the assertion that children of six are “mighty prophets, seers blessed,” would, we may fear, have seemed to him portentous nonsense; and there are doubtless still a few persons left who would agree with Plato. Wordsworth indeed has so mingled the things that are above with the things that are below the reason as not merely to idealize but to supernaturalize the child, and this probably would have dissatisfied Rousseau as well as Plato.

A man becomes un-Platonic and pseudo-mystical in direct ratio to his contempt for rationality as compared with the unconscious, the spontaneous, the instinctive. The speeches of all the sages, says Maeterlinck, are outweighed by the unconscious wisdom of the passing child. “L'enfant qui se tait

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est mille fois plus sage que Marc Aurèle qui parle.” This is not the utterance of a genuine mystic, but of a Rousseauist who pays to what is below the reason the homage that is due only to what is above it; who with all his glorification of the child does not attain the truly childlike, but merely the confused revery and sense of strangeness that come from emancipating the subliminal self from rational control. Insight does not thus confound the subconscious with the superconscious and abolish all the distinctions of the intellect in the process. It draws with special sharpness the very line that the Rousseauist would obliterate — that between man and nature. So far from encouraging a return to nature, it rather makes one feel, as Arnold puts it, that man and nature can never be fast friends. The more mystical the insight becomes, the stronger this feeling is likely to be. It may very well lead to an attitude toward outer nature, that is not simply indifferent but ascetic; and this of course is the opposite excess from that of the Rousseauist. “There is surely a piece of divinity within us,” says Sir Thomas Browne, “something that was before the elements and owes no homage unto the sun.” The new unity that the

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sentimental naturalist or Rousseauist proclaims assumes the exact opposite. According to the Rousseauist, we should overcome the sense of the separateness of man and nature of which Sir Thomas Browne speaks, and arrive rather at a "sense sublime" of their common essence, of a something, as Wordsworth goes on to say, "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns and in the mind of man."

Formerly not merely the Platonist and the mystic, but the ordinary humanist, looked on outer nature as alien, or at least irrelevant, to the highest interests of man. Indeed, Plato himself has rendered admirably at the beginning of the "Phædrus" the humanistic attitude toward nature, — an attitude as far removed from indifference or ascetic distrust as it is from the worship of the Rousseauist. Socrates, we there read, so far from looking on books as a "vain and endless strife," had allowed Phædrus to entice him out into the country by the hope of reading a book, much as "the hungry flocks are led on by those who shake leaves or some fruit before them." But once in the country Socrates feels so keenly and describes so happily its freshness and charm, that Phædrus expresses surprise

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that he does not come oftener ; and Socrates replies : "The fields and trees will not teach me anything but men in the city do." If we compare the Platonic Socrates with the Wordsworthian sage whose "daily teachers had been woods and rills," we shall perceive the gap between the humanist of the old type and the modern sentimental naturalist.

We have already seen how easily this humanistic point of view may be exaggerated. Lessing's attitude toward landscape-painting is an example. For the purposes of art at least Lessing was not willing to grant that the landscape is a state of the soul. For Lessing, as for every true classicist, the highest thing in art is the plot or design and the subordinating of everything else to its orderly development. There is evidently an antinomy between this concentration of the will on a definite end, and the mood of melting into nature that has been so cultivated by our modern romanticists. What Hazlitt says of Raphael applies equally to Lessing : "Raphael not only could not paint a landscape ; he could not paint people in a landscape. . . . His figures have always an *in-door* look, that is, a set, determined, voluntary, dramatic character, arising from their own passions,

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or a watchfulness of those of others, and want that wild uncertainty of expression which is connected with the accidents of nature and the changes of the elements. He has nothing *romantic* about him."

This interpenetration of nature and human nature, this running together in revery, not merely of the different planes of being but, as we shall see presently, of the different sense-impressions on the physical plane, is the point of departure of all our distinctively modern confusions. The refusal to sacrifice the firm distinctions established by the intellect and enforced by the will between the planes of being is in general the chief difference between the Platonist and the Rousseauist. This difference comes out with special clearness at the very point where the Rousseauist usually claims to be most Platonic, — in his conception of love. Byron says that Rousseau was a lover of "ideal Beauty," and one immediately thinks of Plato. But let us not be the dupes of fine phrases. In his dealings with love as with everything else Plato invariably shows himself what Wordsworth would call an "officious slave" of the "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions." He distinguishes between an earthly and

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an Uranian Aphrodite, and while recognizing that the first may be a stepping-stone to the second, never actually confounds the two. Every one, on the other hand, must have been struck with the indiscriminate use of the word love in the romantic movement. Alfred de Musset, for example, does not draw any clear line between his love for God and his love for a grisette. If any individual romanticist escapes from this error, he has to thank the coldness of his temperament or the accidents of his training and environment rather than his philosophy.

The biographer of Dante Gabriel Rossetti says that Rossetti's message to the world is summed up in such lines as —

Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

So far from separating the earthly and heavenly loves Rossetti evidently mixes them in one intoxicating brew. The ultimate origins of this modern mixture are doubtless mediæval, but for the forms of it that bear upon our subject we do not need to go behind Rousseau. Joubert is probably the first

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to point out how pervasive in Rousseau is this particular confusion of the planes of being: "Rousseau had a voluptuous mind. In his writings the soul is always mingled with the body and never distinct from it. No one has ever rendered more vividly the impression of the flesh touching the spirit and the delights of their marriage."

Now Joubert remarks elsewhere that spirit and matter can come into relation with one another only through the medium of illusion; and he goes on to say some of the most penetrating things that have been said by any writer about the rôle of imaginative illusion in mediating between the lower and the higher nature of man. Joubert, we should add, was a genuine Platonist in an age when pseudo-Platonism was rife, though at times he tends to fall into excessive subtlety, to be too vaporous and ethereal. Joubert, then, conceives it to be the rôle of the imagination, mediating as it does between sense and reason, to lend its magic and glamour to the latter, to throw as it were a veil of divine illusion over some essential truth. Perhaps this is as fair a statement as can be made of the aim of the highest art, though it may evidently become a pretext for

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falling into a lifeless allegory.¹ The imagination must be really free and spontaneous, and the truth itself must not be too precisely formulated, if we are to arrive at that vital fusing of illusion and insight with the accompanying sense of infinitude that is found in the true symbol.

This alliance of the imagination and reason, of *l'illusion et la sagesse*, is something that transcends all rule, and is indeed so difficult that it has seemed even to great thinkers impossible. We have already mentioned Pascal's attack on the imagination. The imagination, he says, is "a mistress of error and falsity," "a proud power hostile to reason," so reinforcing with its illusions the affections and impressions of sense that reason will inevitably succumb, unless it has the aid of a sort of *deus ex machina* in the form of a divine revelation. This theory reveals of course profound insight into the ordinary facts of human nature, and goes vastly deeper than any idle chatter about art for art's sake. Yet it has in it something morose and ascetic, inasmuch as it seems

¹ This was the frequent result of a somewhat similar view of art in the Middle Ages. Cf. Petrarch's phrase: *Veritatem rerum pulchris velaminibus adornare*.

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to deny that alliance between illusion and rationality, or, in Aristotelian parlance, between the wonderful and the probable, that is actually found in the greatest poetry, pagan as well as Christian. In any case the theory does not hold out much hope for the modern man. He is likely to find more to his purpose in the remarkable theory of the imagination outlined by Bacon in his "Advancement of Learning." He is discussing the rôle of rhetoric and rhetorical persuasion in a scheme of studies. "Reason," he says, "would become captive and servile if eloquence of persuasion did not practice and win the imagination from the affection's part, and contract a confederacy between the reason and imagination against the affections. For the affections themselves carry ever an appetite to good as the reason doth; the difference is that *the affection beholdeth merely the present; reason beholdeth the future and sum of time*; and therefore, the present filling the imagination more, reason is commonly vanquished; but after that force of eloquence and persuasion hath made things future and remote appear as present, then upon the revolt of the imagination reason prevaieth."

Great poetry, as Longinus would say, does not

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act by persuasion but by ecstasy ; otherwise Bacon's theory has evident points of similarity with that of Joubert. Perhaps there are no better examples of the mingling of illusion and insight than Joubert requires than some of the "myths" of Plato. Plato indeed is not only one of the most imaginative and spontaneous of writers, but his spontaneity is not a denial but rather a completion of the work of reason. Just as we have distinguished therefore between the Platonic unity of insight and the unity of instinct of which the Rousseauist dreams, so we may contrast with the spontaneity of Rousseau a higher spontaneity where the powers of illusion are in the service of the reason and not of the senses. This whole problem of illusion may very well turn out to be the central problem of art. The neo-classical theorist affected unduly the rational element in art, and allowed as little as he could for the immeasurable potentialities of illusion. The romanticists have given us plenty of illusion, but illusion divorced from rational purpose, and only too often a false illusion of the flesh. Rousseau, as we have seen, was ready to take flight from the real world into a world of pure illusion, but his dream-world as he describes

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it is in some ways only too reminiscent of the earth. He surrounds himself in his *pays des chimères* with a "seraglio of houris," and these voluptuous visions bear the features of women he has actually known. His "blood takes fire" at all this impassioned recollection. We evidently have here the very opposite of what Bacon desires. Rousseau's imagination has contracted a confederacy with his affections against the reason, and throws its golden glamour not only over present but also over past sensation, — a refinement that scarcely entered into Bacon's reckoning. Rousseau indeed perfected the Epicureanism that consists in intensifying and prolonging enjoyment by revery. If he can thus fuse soul and sense he is careless of the "future and sum of time." Rousseau himself speaks of "covering with a delicious veil the aberrations of the senses";¹ and in the very passage where Byron calls Rousseau a lover of ideal Beauty he writes that

he knew
How to make madness beautiful, and threw
O'er erring thoughts and deeds a heavenly hue.

This use of imaginative illusion in making madness

¹ *Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1^{re} partie, lettre 1.

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beautiful would, if traced down, bring us at last to what has been termed the phosphorescent slime of some of our modern decadents. The art of giving a heavenly hue to materialistic impulse assumes many aspects in the sham idealisms and pseudo-spiritualities of the nineteenth century ; we have "mystical" and "Platonic" raptures that land one at last in a mire of sensuality ; effusions of fine sentiments about brotherly love that are only a specious mask for envy and hatred of riches and success ; "new thought" that is so lofty as to deny even the existence of matter and yet turns out somehow to be interested only in the preservation of physical health, etc.

But to return to the literary and artistic problem. The tendency I have just been describing seems a rather strange concomitant of Rousseau's theory of the primitive and the childlike, yet such in nearly every case it can be shown to be. The breaking down of all barriers and boundaries in order to achieve the emotional and instinctive unity that the child enjoys, and that primitive man is supposed to have enjoyed, always results in a certain mingling of the flesh and spirit though it may not always go so far as what the Germans expressively but dis-

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agreeably call priapism of the soul. The art that is content to guard its own boundaries, the Rousseauist would say, is still caught in a hard formalism, and has not yet felt the expansive power of the primal love. Possibly this whole side of romanticism finds its best expression in Richard Wagner and his theory of the music-drama. According to Wagner pure music and pure poetry, that is music and poetry that keep each within its own confines, are alike unavailing. They become effective only when they are rid of an unprofitable restraint and self-limitation and melt together in a mystical erotic embrace. Poetry freed from clogging intellectualism "sinks down with his bride (Music) and learns the hidden wonders of the deep," "knows the Unconscious, the Instinctive, the Purely-human," and at last becomes truly creative.¹ "The offspring of this marriage of Poetry with Music, of word-speech and tone-speech, the embodied love-moment of both arts" is verse-melody;² and this supreme fruit of the union of Music and Poetry is only a return to the primitive

¹ See Ellis's translation of Wagner's prose works, vol. ii (*Opera and Drama*), pp. 201, 286, 352, 353, 356.

² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

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kinship of the two arts, a recovery of the primitive melody (*Urmelodie*).¹

In short, nothing could be conceived more Rousseauistic than Wagner's theory of opera. It is Rousseauistic not only in the general conception that men are to meet, not in a common discipline but a common sympathy, that love is to triumph over restraint, and that in so far as men attain this emotional union they are merely reverting to a pristine felicity: it is Rousseauistic also in the specific application of this conception to music. According to Rousseau, language and music were primitively one, and this primitive speech-song was at the same time poetry.² The period of the unconscious, of confused emotional unity, is to be preferred to the period of clear and conscious intellectual distinctions. Like Rousseau and Wordsworth, Wagner is pervaded by the fear of the meddling intellect as being fatal to spontaneity.

¹ *Opera and Drama*, pp. 282, 293.

² See *Essai sur l'Origine des langues*. Rousseau has even anticipated in this essay Wagner's attempt to foist primitivism upon the Greeks. I am not claiming a direct influence of Rousseau upon Wagner. One intermediary between Rousseau and Wagner was E. T. A. Hoffmann (cf. *Oxford History of Music*, vol. vi, pp. 351, 352). For Hoffmann and Rousseau, see p. 176.

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But we should already know what to think of the claims of such a point of view to be either mystical or Platonic. The higher unity and spontaneity of the Platonist is associated, as I have already said, with a concentration of the will, with a sense of awe, and elevation, and restraint, and not with either an expansion or a titillation of the sensibility. The Platonist does not confound the planes of being, and in particular is open to the charge of separating too sharply rather than of running together the planes of flesh and spirit. Goethe, who in spite of Napoleon's remark frequently shows himself a partisan of the *genre tranché*, says that there are but two legitimate kinds of music, the kind that impels one to dance and the kind that inspires one to pray. What the modern symbolists and decadents have admired in Wagner on the other hand is a mixture of the sacred and profane elements,—what one of them has termed a “voluptuous religiosity.”

Hitherto in this chapter I have been striving to distinguish between the Platonic as opposed to what I have variously called the pseudo-Platonic or Rousseauistic or romantic point of view. My use of the word romantic has doubtless caused irritation. It

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requires courage in any one who aspires to be looked on as a careful thinker to use the word at all. Some one indeed has suggested that it would be a philanthropic undertaking to found a society for suppressing the word *romantic* entirely ; a still more philanthropic undertaking, in my opinion, would be to found a society for its more accurate definition. The confusion that has grown up about the word is largely to be ascribed to the romanticists themselves and their dislike of the "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions." To abolish the word altogether would indeed be about as intelligent as to abolish the general denomination "bird" because of certain differences that exist between, let us say, an ostrich and a wren. Now I not only would admit that certain varieties of romanticists are at least as different from other varieties as an ostrich from a wren, but actually need to insist on some of these differences in the interest of my present subject.

But before coming to the traits by which romanticists differ, we may appropriately ask what is the trait they all have in common. An Aristotelian would reply that this common trait is a love of the

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wonderful rather than the probable. A craving for the marvelous, for adventure and surprise, exists, as Aristotle says, to some extent in all men. A man's temper grows romantic in proportion as he is interested in the marvelous, in adventure and surprise, rather than in tracing cause and effect. The man of the Middle Ages was often romantic in this sense: he was haunted by the idea of adventure, the rare and unusual event. In its extreme form this pursuit of adventure resulted in something similar to what we have in Don Quixote, in an actual clash between the logic of dreamland and the logic of every-day fact.

Whenever the love of adventure is keen, and the analytical and logical faculties are either dormant or occupied elsewhere, art may very well come to be looked on as a pleasant vagabondage, rather than as a working toward a definite goal "in accordance," as Aristotle would say, "with probability or necessity." And in direct proportion as men look on art in this way, they are likely to be indifferent to the clearly defined type; in the drama, for example, they are likely to be tolerant of more mixtures than those enumerated by Polonius, — "tragedy

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comedy, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral," etc. Now the English have always been imaginative rather than formal or logical in their art and literature, and this is no doubt one reason why the English, as compared with the Greeks or French, have been careless of the *genre tranché*.

Plainly, however, this indifference to the clearly defined type is something very different from the mixtures and confusions we find in that side of the romantic movement associated with Rousseau. Indeed, this Rousseauistic romanticism is in some respects so distinct from other varieties that we may partially sympathize with those who regret that it could not have received another name. The Rousseauist resembles other romanticists in being adventurous rather than purposeful; but his adventure, his thirst for novelty, for the thrill of wonder and surprise, has assumed a new form: it is not so much a quest or a dreaming of the rare and unusual event as of the rare and unusual sensation; it is less an attitude of the spirit than a state of the sensibility, or rather the spirit itself is so used as to throw its halo over the impressions of sense,

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invest them with imaginative illusion, and give them a sort of infinite reverberation. Baudelaire says that he attains through odors the feeling of infinitude that others attain through the suggestive power of sound. His soul "swims" ¹ on perfumes.

But we have already spoken of this art of mingling flesh and spirit in revery. Whatever else may be thought of it, it has certainly enriched and deepened the life of the senses. But the danger of the art is already visible in its first great adept. Hume writes of Rousseau: "He has only *felt* during the whole course of his life; and in this respect his sensibility rises to a pitch beyond what I have seen any example of: but it still gives him a more acute feeling of pain than of pleasure. He is like a man who were stript not only of his clothes, but of his skin, and turned out in that situation to combat with the rude and boisterous elements." ²

This almost pathological keenness of sensation, this hyperæsthesia as it may be termed, is, if we may judge from the confessions of many who have possessed it, a somewhat doubtful gift of the gods.

¹ Cf. Shelley's *Alastor*: "Soul-dissolving perfumes."

² Letter to Dr. Blair, 25 March, 1766.

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At any rate, it marks off its possessors from the other types of romanticist. Keats, for example, is sometimes spoken of as an Elizabethan born out of due season ; but Keats regrets his "horrid morbidity of temperament,"¹ and I for one do not believe that the Elizabethans suffered from morbidity² of just that kind. The great romanticists of that age were not, like so many of this modern brand, mere human sensitive-plants, recoiling from the rough and tumble of the world. They were not, as Coleridge complains of himself, "beset with the most wretched and unmanning reluctance and shrinking from action." They were interested in actual adventure, caring little for the mysterious dalliance of soul and sense in the tower of ivory.

The modern school, on the other hand, is often more interested in this dalliance than it is in action of either the romantic or classical types, — in other

¹ I do not mean to disparage Keats by what I say about him here and elsewhere. I believe he had a vein of essential manliness that was a counterpoise to the "horrid morbidity." As a matter of fact, the Rousseauistic temperament was far more marked in Shelley than in Keats.

² Of course some of the later Elizabethans (e. g., Ford) suffered from their own type of morbidity.

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words, in action that is either primarily adventurous or primarily purposeful. The highest literary and artistic ambition of the school is not so much to paint action as to suggest revery. We have tried to show that this revery is a product of the primitivism of Rousseau, of his attempt to revive the child-like and the spontaneous by a return to "nature," and that in any case it should not be regarded as either Platonic or mystical. After all these preliminary explanations and definitions we should now be prepared to enter the romantic palace of dreams and to make a closer study of the magic secrets of suggestiveness that have been practiced by its occupants during the past century.

CHAPTER VI

SUGGESTIVENESS IN ROMANTIC ART

I. WORD-PAINTING

ACCORDING to neo-classic theory, as we have seen, the poet is to be a painter of things outside himself,—in other words, he is to be purely objective. Homer, says Aristotle, does not entertain us with his own person, but is more than any other poet an imitator. Now if the poet is thus to imitate the outer world he must have wide knowledge of it. “The sovereign poem” (i. e., the epic), says Muzio,¹ “is a painting of the universe”; and the epic poet should therefore be universal. According to the romanticist, on the other hand, all that the poet, even the epic poet, needs to possess is feeling. What, for example, was Lamartine’s equipment for writing epics? We may infer from the verse of Sainte-Beuve:

Lamartine ignorant qui ne sait que son âme, —
and “soul” in romantic parlance we should remem-

¹ *Arte poetica* (Venice, 1551).

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ber is about synonymous with a gush of sensibility.

The theory that would divert the poet from himself, and make of him a painter of human actions, has its advantages, especially for such forms as the drama or epic. There are evident dangers in taking the next step and dealing in this detached and objective way with words, in looking on them merely as the colors with which the poet paints his pictures. Lessing, who refuted the confusion that had arisen from this assimilation of words to colors, does not himself escape the charge of treating words too objectively. Words do indeed follow one another in time, but not in quite so inert and passive a way as Lessing's theory seems to imply ; or, rather, they are inert and passive only in proportion as they are employed unimaginatively. But imagination may transform them, play about them like a lambent flame,¹ and infuse into them a new and active potency. Only three years after the publication of the "Laokoon," Herder pointed out the inadequacy of Lessing's way of looking on words. Herder's

¹ Cf. Joubert : " Les mots s'illuminent quand le doigt du poète y fait passer son phosphore."

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point of view is what we should call distinctively romantic. "The essence of poetry," says Herder, "is in the power that cleaves to words, a magic power that works upon my soul through fantasy and recollection."¹ And he regrets that Lessing has not put "working on our souls or energy,"² at the very centre of poetry, in contrasting it with painting. He had learned especially from Homer, Herder continues, that poetry does not act upon the ear through a mere succession of sounds, but energizes and stimulates into synthetic activity the inner powers of the spirit, above all, the imagination. Herder, in short, makes a plea for what we should call suggestiveness.

In his praise of Homer, Herder may have been influenced by a work that exercised also an important influence on Lessing, — Diderot's "Letter on the Deaf and Dumb" (1751). This work of Diderot's is the kind one might expect from a man who lived at the "mercy of his diaphragm." There is a profuse but somewhat turbid flow of ideas. We seem to be listening to several men each presenting a different point of view; at one moment to an

¹ *Erstes krit. Wäldchen* (ed. Suphan), p. 139. ² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

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admirer of Father Castel¹ and his color-clavichord; at another to a keen analyst who is striving to set objective bounds to the arts; still again to a romanticist who is interested rather in the way the arts may run together emotionally. Lessing has turned to account the keenly analytical passages and neglected the rest. This is worth noting because the Germans in general have greatly exaggerated the kinship between Diderot and Lessing. The prevailing point of view in Lessing, as I have already said, is humanistic, in Diderot, naturalistic and humanitarian. Diderot is already on his way to all the confusions of humanistic values to which naturalism in either its scientific or sentimental form has given rise. Both as a scientist and as an impressionist, Diderot is interested in the mysterious intercommunication of the senses in the depths of individual feeling. He asks of one person: "Had there grown up in the long run a sort of correspondence between two different senses?"² He says that the blind professor of Mathematics, Saunderson, *voyait par la peau*.³ He mentions another blind per-

¹ *Œuvres de Diderot* (Éd. Assézat), I, p. 356.

² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

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son who could tell the colors of different cloths by the touch,¹ still another who distinguished the sound of voices as "blond or brunette."² Diderot's own impressionism arises from an emotional unrestraint that spurns all boundaries. "The very essence of Diderot's criticism and of his whole understanding of art," says M. Faguet, "is the confusion of the *genres*. . . . If inclined to be a bit malicious one might say he was a good dramatic critic in the Salon and a good art critic in dealing with the drama."³

And M. Faguet goes on to praise Diderot and point out the strength as well as the weakness of his method. But both his strength and his weakness are equally remote from the strength and weakness of Lessing. Indeed, in the very pages that have furnished such important hints to Lessing, especially as to the importance of choosing the right moment in plastic art, Diderot discusses Homer in a way that anticipates not Lessing but Herder. Diderot is struck by the magic power that Homer and other great poets can confer on the slightest words and phrases so that they reverberate in the depths of our

¹ *Œuvres de Diderot* (Éd. Assézat), I, p. 332. ² *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³ Article "Diderot" in his *Dix-Huitième Siècle*.

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sensibility. He is interested in Homer not as a por-trayer of actions but as a suggester of images. He proclaims that, though poetry cannot paint to the eye, it can and must, if it is to rise above prose, paint to the imagination. You may, he says, have clearness, purity, precision; you may show taste in your choice of words and in the careful rounding of your periods,—with all this you will have attained a good prose style, but still remain far short of poetry. “There passes into the speech of the poet a spirit that moves and vivifies its every syllable. What is this spirit? I have sometimes felt its presence, but all I know about it is that through it things are at once spoken and pictured; that at the same time that the understanding grasps them, the soul is moved by them, the imagination sees them, the ear hears them, and discourse is no longer a linking together of vigorous phrases that set forth the thought nobly and forcibly, but a tissue of closely crowded hieroglyphs that paint it. I might say that in this sense all poetry is emblematic.”¹ (Nowadays we should say symbolical.)

This is that true poetical painting which Lessing

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 374.

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would probably not have denied, but of which he has certainly said very little in the "Laokoon." Homer especially is praised by Diderot for the number of words and phrases of magic suggestiveness that he contains, — words and phrases that are a "hieroglyphic painting," that is, painting not to the eye but "to the imagination."¹ Diderot admits that this art of painting to the imagination is infinitely difficult: the hieroglyphs acquire their suggestiveness, as he surmises, through certain subtle combinations of long and short syllables in Greek and Latin and through certain collocations of vowels and consonants in the modern languages. These hieroglyphs (and therefore true poetry) are nearly always untranslatable. They require in the person who feels them something of the same poetical spirit that inspired them; to the unpoetical they are meaningless.

An interesting comparison may be made between Diderot's theory of suggestive word-painting in poetry and the theory of suggestiveness in a treatise of Rousseau's I have already mentioned, — the "Essay on the Origin of Language."² This work

¹ *Œuvres de Diderot* (Éd. Assézat), I, p. 377.

² The exact date of the composition of this work is uncertain.

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is perhaps less rich in ideas than Diderot's "Letter on the Deaf and Dumb," but it is also less confused. In the act of composition at least Rousseau did not live at the "mercy of his diaphragm." In short, he is a great writer and not merely an improviser of genius. Now in this particular essay Rousseau divides as with a knife the old from the new. He repudiates the pseudo-classical efforts to get with one art the effects of another, and at the same time indicates the true means by which this double effect may be attained. The arts should not be blended outwardly and formally as Father Castel had done in his effort to paint music, but they may be blended emotionally. In attacking Castel, Rousseau anticipates the central generalization of the "Laokoon." "I have seen,"¹ he says, "that famous clavichord on which, as it was claimed, music was produced with colors. But a man shows a very poor knowledge of the workings of natural law who does not perceive that colors are effective in virtue of their permanence and sounds through their though scarcely later than 1754. It circulated more or less in manuscript, but was not actually published until 1781.

¹ For Rousseau's personal relations with Castel, see *Confessions*, livre vii (1742).

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successiveness. . . . Thus every sense has its own peculiar field. The field of music is time, that of painting, space. To multiply simultaneous sounds, or to make colors follow one another in single file, is to change their economy, is to put the eye in the place of the ear and the ear in the place of the eye," etc.

The pictures that music cannot paint directly it can however paint suggestively. "One of the great advantages of the musician," says Rousseau, "is to be able to paint things that are inaudible, whereas it is impossible for the painter to depict things that are invisible.¹ And the greatest miracle of an art that acts only through movement is its power to present images of everything, even the image of repose. Sleep, the calm of night, solitude, silence itself, enter into the pictures of music." Music, Rousseau goes on to say, achieves these paintings, "by arousing through one sense emotions similar to those that are aroused by another, . . . by substituting for the inanimate image of an object the

¹ Rousseau, of course, very much underestimates, from our modern point of view, the suggestive power of painting. See Walter Pater's essay on "Giorgione," and the passage from *Hazlitt* quoted later.

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emotions that its actual image stirs in the heart of the beholder. Music can render not merely the agitation of the sea, the roaring of flames in a conflagration, the flowing of brooks, the falling of rain, or swollen torrents ; but it can paint the horror of a frightful desert, darken the walls of a dungeon, quiet the tempest, make the air clear and calm, and diffuse from the orchestra a new freshness over the groves. It does not represent these objects directly, but awakens in the soul the same sentiments we experience on seeing them."

The theory of suggestiveness is already fairly complete in such passages as those I have just been quoting from Rousseau and Diderot. Like Diderot and Rousseau, and unlike Lessing, the romantic critics are going to be less interested in the analytical and formal bounding and delimiting of the arts than in the new synthesis, — in the way the arts may melt together and interpenetrate in emotion. The following passage from the "Athenäum" is typical for Germany : "We should once more try to bring the arts closer together and seek for transitions from one to the other. Statues perhaps may quicken into pictures, pictures become poems, poems

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music, and (who knows?) in like manner stately church music may once more rise heavenward as a cathedral." ¹

In England Coleridge and Hazlitt write very much to the purpose on suggestiveness, though in substance they do not go much beyond Rousseau and Diderot. Coleridge begins by repudiating the kind of word-painting that Lessing has condemned in the "Laokoon." "The presence of genius," he says, "is not shown in elaborating a picture: we have had many specimens of this sort of work in modern poems, where all is so dutchified, if I may use the word, by the most minute touches, that the

¹ A. W. Schlegel: "Die Gemählde" (*Athenäum*, Zweiter Band, pp. 49, 50). Diderot's influence on Schlegel is marked in many of the *Fragmente*, for example in the following: "Im Styl des ächten Dichters ist nichts Schmuck, alles nothwendige Hieroglyphe." "Die Poesie ist Musik für das innere Ohr, und Mahlerey für das innere Auge; aber gedämpfte Musik, aber verschwebende Mahlerey." — "Mancher betrachtet Gemählde am liebsten mit verschlossenen Augen, damit die Fantasie nicht gestört werde." (*Ibid.*, Ersten Bandes, Zweites Stück, p. 45.) Schlegel would no doubt have preferred to the actual picture Diderot's musically suggestive description of it: "Hierin ist Diderot Meister. Er musizirt viele Gemählde wie der Abt Vogler." And again: "Sich eine Gemähldeausstellung von einem Diderot beschreiben lassen, ist ein wahrhaft kaiserlicher Luxus." (*Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47.)

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reader naturally asks why words, and not painting, are used. . . . The power of poetry is, by a single word, perhaps, to instil energy into the mind, which compels the imagination to produce the picture. Prospero tells Miranda, —

One midnight,

Fated to the purpose, did Antonio open
The gates of Milan ; and i' the dead of darkness,
The ministers for the purpose hurried thence
Me, and thy crying self.

Here, by introducing a single happy epithet, 'crying,' in the last line, a complete picture is presented to the mind, and in the production of such pictures the power of genius consists." ¹ Elsewhere he connects his theory of suggestive word-painting with his distinction between the imagination and fancy. "The poet," he says, "should paint to the imagination not to the fancy, and I know no happier case to exemplify the distinction between these two faculties." After citing an example of the former mode of poetic painting from Milton he adds: "This is creation rather than painting, or if painting, yet such, and with such co-presence of the whole picture flashed at

¹ *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Bohn Edition), p. 138.

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once upon the eye, as the sun paints in a camera obscura. But the poet must likewise understand and command what Bacon calls the *vestigia communia* of the senses, the latency of all in each, and more especially as by a magical *penna duplex*, the excitement of vision by sound and the exponents of sound,"¹ etc.

Hazlitt arrives at conclusions very similar to those of Coleridge in his essay on "Gusto," though he applies them especially to painting. Hazlitt sums up in the word gusto what we should variously call vitality, expression, suggestiveness. Gusto is the "inner principle," the living passion, the subtle pervading power that overleaps all formal barriers and acts synthetically on the senses and imagination of the beholder. In landscape-painting, as appears from a passage I have already quoted,² the synthesis is between man and outer nature. "In a word," says Hazlitt in language closely parallel to that of Rousseau, "gusto in painting is where the impressions made on one sense excite by affinity those of another." However, in attributing so much suggestiveness, even musical suggestiveness, to painting,

¹ *Biographia Literaria*, ch. xxii.

² See pp. 97, 98.

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Hazlitt goes beyond Rousseau. For example, he writes that "Titian's landscapes have a prodigious gusto both in the coloring and forms. We shall never forget one that we saw many years ago in the Orleans Gallery of Actæon hunting. It had a brown, mellow, autumnal look. The sky was of the color of stone. The winds seemed to sing through the rustling branches of the trees, and already you might hear the twanging of bows resound through the tangled mazes of the wood." Of Claude's landscapes Hazlitt complains that "they give more of nature as cognizable by one sense alone [than those of any other painter, but] they do not interpret one sense by another ; . . . that is, his eye wanted imagination, it did not strongly sympathize with his other faculties. He saw the landscape but he did not feel it," etc.

In this passage Hazlitt is estimating Claude, not objectively by his intellectual breadth and excellent design, but from the point of view of a certain subtle emotional appeal. Under this romantic influence the artist comes to be chiefly esteemed, not for the careful and coherent working out of a rational whole, but for his power to enthrall the individual

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sensibility. Instead of being an imitator in the Aristotelian sense he becomes a "weaver of magic and spells." Art and literature pass more and more from the domain of action into the region of revery. Art is reduced to suggestion, and suggestion is defined as an "attenuated hypnosis."¹ In the words of M. Bergson: "Art aims to lull to sleep the active powers of our personality and bring us to a state of perfect docility in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us, in which we sympathize with the sentiment expressed. In the methods of art we find under a refined and in some sort spiritualized form the methods by which hypnosis is ordinarily obtained."²

Suggestive power, of the kind M. Bergson describes, should indeed be at the artist's command. Unfortunately the romanticist only too often does not go any further. He rests in the hypnosis for the sake of the hypnosis, or, as I have said elsewhere, in illusion for the sake of illusion. He is interested in art only as it is related to the senses

¹ For a working out of this point of view, see P. Souriau: *La suggestion dans l'art*.

² *Les données immédiates de la conscience*, p. 11.

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and not as it is related to the intellect and character and will. The pure æstheticism of Keats was perhaps a legitimate reaction from the dryness and didacticism of certain pseudo-classicists, who, so far from knowing how to act suggestively on several senses at once, did not even know how to make a right appeal to any one sense. But to accept this æstheticism as final would be to turn poetry into a sort of lotus-eating. The great poets of the past have practiced suggestiveness, but only as one element of their art and with infinitely greater sobriety than our modern romanticists. It is doubtful if any one of them can rival in this respect the "fine excess" of Keats; whether any one of them devised so many "subtle hieroglyphs," to use Diderot's term, — so many words or phrases that evoke some object before the inner eye, or charm the ear by an unheard melody; that invite, in short, to intense æsthetic contemplation. There are probably more expressions of this kind, as Matthew Arnold says, in the tale of "Isabella" alone than in all the extant plays of Sophocles. "But the action, the story?" Arnold asks; and he goes on to show how inferior the story is in Keats to the same story as told by Boccaccio, "who above

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all things delineates his object ; who subordinates expression to that which it is designed to express."

The deflecting of literature from either rational or dramatic purpose to suggestive word-painting, which so marked one whole side of the romantic movement, is closely related to what I have defined as primitivism ; to the contempt of the reason and the things that are above the reason, joined with a desire to return to nature and so recover the unity of instinct. The prime virtue for the romanticist is to have fresh and spontaneous sensations, or else to revive in memory the freshness and vividness of past sensations and then convey them suggestively to others. Romantic word-painting, we should recollect, is not merely the art of suggesting images to others, but first of all of suggesting them to one's self. Wordsworth, for example, begins by seeing the "host of golden daffodils," and then later—

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude ;

finally he succeeds in conveying the vision in all its freshness to us.

The inward eye of which Wordsworth speaks was comparatively dormant in men before the last cen-

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tury ; since then it has been so developed as to become a sort of new sense that brings the objects of outer nature into contact with the soul through the medium of imaginative illusion, refining them in the process, and attuning them to human emotion. This new sense is in itself delightful and legitimate, and the revery with which it is associated has its own uses. The romantic error has been to make of this revery the serious substance of life instead of its occasional solace ; to set up the things that are below the reason as a substitute for those that are above it ; in short, to turn the nature cult into a religion.

We should note that in its more advanced forms the nature cult leads to a new symbolism. According to Coleridge the imagination is the great unifying power, and what it unifies through the agency of the new sense of which I have just been speaking, is man and physical nature. Outer objects no longer seem foreign and alien to man, but akin to something in his own mind. "The world is a universal trope of the spirit," says Novalis. "Every object of which the wood is composed," writes Hugo, "corresponds to some similar object in the

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forest of the soul.”¹ The deeper a man dives down into the subrational region where such intuitions occur, the more he has this feeling not merely of correspondencies between himself and outer nature but between the different senses within himself. He finally attains that “tenebrous and profound unity” of which Baudelaire speaks, where “perfumes and colors and sounds correspond to one another.”²

The most striking thing about the romantic sym-

¹ Tout objet dont le bois se compose répond
A quelque objet pareil dans la forêt de l'âme.

Voix Intérieures, xix.

² Baudelaire's sonnet has been so influential on more recent French writers and artists (especially the symbolists) that it deserves to be quoted:—

CORRESPONDANCES

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies;
Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

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bol is its subjective character. A man may discover any number of correspondencies between himself and outer nature, without thereby developing correspondencies between himself and other men. Quite the contrary: the more he yields to this symbolizing mood, the farther he is likely to get off into some dim realm, some "mystic mid-region of Weir," where no one can penetrate but himself. We may indeed say of the whole tendency in its extremer forms, "that way madness lies." The romantic symbol which is vague and shadowy in literature becomes doubly so in painting. Certain ultra-romantic painters (Rossetti for example) have indulged in a symbolism that may well match for obscurity the pseudo-classic allegories of which Lessing complains.¹

We should not, however, allow the romanticists to put us entirely out of humor with the symbol. The imagination is the great unifying power, but it may be used to help forward and symbolize man's

¹ As an example of the mysterious symbolizing that may arise from the confusion of plastic art with music we may take Max Klinger's statue of Beethoven. See *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 3^e Période, t. xl, pp. 509, 516, 517.

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union with the truths of reason or the truths above the reason, as well as with outer nature. There is, in short, a humanistic as well as a naturalistic use of the imagination. Even Wordsworth could not fail to be struck by the two types of imagination, one of which he terms the "enthusiastic and meditative," and the other the "human and dramatic." We may take as a concrete instance of the humanistic imagination and the symbol it may create, the Chariot of the Soul in Plato's "Phædrus"; of the naturalistic imagination and its symbolizing, Victor Hugo's poem "Le Satyre" in "La Légende des Siècles." Plato's symbol, dealing as it does with the things that are above the ordinary reason, inspires to awe and reverence and restraint. Hugo's "Satyre" on the other hand is related so closely to the whole modern movement we are studying that we can afford to linger over it a moment.

A hideous and hirsute satyr so offends against decency that he is finally dragged by Hercules before Jupiter and the other Olympians; but he sings a mysterious song that sends a sympathetic thrill through the whole of creation, and as he sings he keeps expanding and at the same time melting into

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the outer world, until at last he is revealed as the god Pan and Jupiter cowers before him. The poem symbolizes the running together and unifying of all things (especially of flesh and spirit) through the power of the primal love working in the depths of the primitive, the unconscious, the instinctive; it invites to vast emotional expansion, and at the same time to revolt, not merely against every form of authority and discipline, but against all boundaries and limitations whatsoever, as synonymous with evil.

Symbolism is no necessary concomitant of romantic suggestiveness. It has appeared most frequently, though not exclusively, in connection with that side of modern art which has aimed to be musically rather than pictorially suggestive. The kind of word-painter who has flourished during the past century has usually been content to paint vividly to the imagination either present impressions or else past impressions that have flashed upon his inward eye in revery. Rousseau contains remarkable examples of this latter kind of description. "I see distinctly," he says, "only what I remember"; and what he remembers with most pleasure is his youthful years when sensations were

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freshest and most spontaneous. "The slightest circumstances of that time please me," he says of his boyhood experiences at Bossey, "for the very reason that they belong to that time. . . . I still see a swallow darting in through the window, a fly alighting on my hand while I recited my lesson; I see the arrangement of the room where we sat; the study of M. Lambercier at our right, an engraving representing all the popes, a barometer, a great calendar; — raspberry-bushes which, growing in a garden slanting steeply up from the back of the house, shaded the window and sometimes trailed even into the room."

The whole scene rises before us "as from the stroke of the Enchanter's wand." Here is a somewhat different word-painting from that of the imitators of Thomson's "Seasons." No one before Rousseau, at least no one of whom we have literary record, had ever shown such preternatural keenness either in receiving or recalling impressions. This sensitiveness of Rousseau extended to all his impressions, especially those of sight, smell, and hearing. (According to Diderot,¹ Rousseau had thought of

¹ Diderot, *Œuvres*, I, p. 332.

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starting a school to teach the flower-girls of Paris how to sort the colors in their bouquets.) "Not only do I remember," he says in describing another scene of his youth, "the time, the place, the persons, but all surrounding objects,— the temperature of the air, its odor, its color, a certain *local impression* felt only there, the vivid recollection of which carries me back anew"; and he proceeds to paint another word-picture of rare intensity and suggestiveness. "Local impression" would in some respects have been a more fortunate phrase than the term local color that the romanticists finally borrowed from the technical vocabulary of the painter. A rendering of the various sensations can in some cases (e. g., in the case of taste or smell) be called local color only by a forced metaphor; whereas to call these sensations and the art of rendering them suggestively "local impressions," would relate the whole tendency to that modern impressionism of which it is only one aspect.

The poet Gray says that he took to botany to save himself the trouble of thinking. This remark might apply at least equally well to many romanticists who took to local color. In one of his tales

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("Le Merle Blanc"), Alfred de Musset insinuates that all this minute lingering over the scenes of childhood was a convenient way of producing the maximum amount of "copy" with the minimum expense of intellect. In this tale Musset makes fun of his fellow romanticists, whom he disguises as birds. The "white blackbird," when turned out of the nest that his mother had built in an old wooden porringer in the depths of a sequestered garden, decides to set up as romantic poet and publishes a poem in forty-eight cantos the subject of which was — himself. "In this poem I related my past sufferings with charming fatuity. I informed the reader of a thousand domestic details of the most piquant interest. The description of my mother's porringer took up no less than fourteen cantos; I had counted its grooves, its holes, its bumps, its nicks, its splinters, its nails, its spots, its different tints and shimmers; I exhibited the inside, the outside, the rim, the bottom, the sides, the inclined planes, the perpendicularities; passing to the contents, I had studied the wisps of grass and straw, the dry leaves, the tiny bits of wood, the gravel, the drops of water, the remains of flies, the broken cockchafers' legs

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that were in it; it was a ravishing description, but don't think that I would have printed it all at once; there are impertinent readers who would have skipped it. I had skillfully cut it up and mingled it with the story in order that none of it should be lost; so that at the most interesting and dramatic moment there suddenly came in fifteen pages of porringer."

What appears in such a passage, quite apart from the desire to turn out copy, is the drift of romantic writing away from ideas toward sensations, from action toward revery. For the romanticist, life is no longer a drama with a definite purpose, but a dream the moods of which are reflected in outer nature, so that to portray outer nature is only another form of self-portrayal. As man thus melts into nature, his vocabulary melts into nature with him and takes on all its variegated hues. The French language had become too abstract and intellectual, says Sainte-Beuve; Rousseau "put green" into it. Such a phrase as "the gold of the broom and the purple of the heather"¹ marked an epoch in French prose. The

¹ "L'or des genêts et la pourpre de la bruyère" (*Lettre à M. de Malesherbes*, 26 janvier, 1762).

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charm of this descriptive writing of Rousseau's is that it still retains a certain sobriety ; there is still a balance between the intellectual and the sensuous elements in his style. In Rousseau's immediate disciple, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the intellectual element yields to a more abundant and more precise use of the picturesque descriptive epithet ; at the same time exoticism makes its appearance. From Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to Loti ¹ the whole globe has been ransacked for "local impressions." The ambition of this modern descriptive school has been to render every object in its ultimate differences from every other object. To this end it has resorted to an ever finer and more delicate shading ; it has tried to seize the shimmer and the half-tint ; its motto has been *la nuance, la nuance toujours !* Bernardin de Saint-Pierre complained of Chateaubriand, his immediate successor in the art of word-painting,

¹ In her life of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (pp. 48-55) Arvède Barine makes an interesting comparison between the description of a storm by Saint-Pierre and a similar description by Pierre Loti. She concludes: "Après les pages qu'on vient de lire, il ne reste plus de progrès à faire. Le seul à tenter serait de revenir à la simplicité puissante d'Homère, de Lucrèce et de Virgile, et de procurer les mêmes émotions en deux ou trois lignes."

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that he had too strong an imagination. "I," said Saint-Pierre, "apply my colors delicately, he lays on his with a broad stroke of the brush." But Chateaubriand is as remarkable for his fine shading as he is for the splash of color. He already speaks of the "pearl-gray light of the moon," though this *nuance* itself would no doubt seem too vague and approximate to later writers like the Goncourts, who developed the lust of the eye to its ultimate refinements.

Chateaubriand deserves a central place in any discussion of the modern forms of descriptive writing. He is the eldest son of Jean-Jacques, and at the same time the father of nineteenth-century French literature. He was a Breton, and one may perhaps without being too fanciful see in his art something of the magic of the Celt. He is a master of the hieroglyphic painting of which Diderot speaks, of the word or phrase of mysterious and compelling charm that usually eludes analysis and defies translation. Stendhal says that duels were fought in his regiment over one of these phrases: *la cime indéterminée des forêts*, — a phrase chosen by Matthew Arnold as an example of descriptive magic. We can

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well understand that a Frenchman of the old school who was looking for rationality rather than for word-painting, suggestive or not, should have found a predominance of such phrases a scandal. And indeed it is plain that the equilibrium is already disappearing in Chateaubriand between the intellectual and sensuous elements in style. This is one of the main reasons why Sainte-Beuve pronounced Chateaubriand the first great writer of the decadence. Possibly nothing better has ever been written on the proper limits of descriptive writing than some of the passages in which Sainte-Beuve discusses this side of Chateaubriand.

“Poetic and picturesque prose,” says Sainte-Beuve, “is, so to speak, only an outlying province of prose, its richest and most brilliant province, an Asia Minor, as the ancients would have said. If language fixes and concentrates itself in this province entirely, it runs the risk of becoming corrupt and losing its true character.” Sainte-Beuve goes on to say that a really great prose-writer dwells, in some sort, at the very source and centre of thought, and from there, as occasion arises, he moves in any direction desired. “If there is need of narration, he narrates ;

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of reasoning and discussing, he discusses ; of describing and painting, he has colors ; he is present everywhere and almost simultaneously at every point of the vast empire. The prose of Buffon or Jean-Jacques is noble, just, vigorous, supple, and brilliant, equal to all uses, preëminent in several, and not appearing out of place or embarrassed wherever used. Can we say as much of the prose of Chateaubriand or even of that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre ? Through the very fact that they have become fixed and as it were acclimated in the region of pure picturesqueness, when the subject invites or forces them to leave this region, they do not do so naturally or with ease ; they have farther to go. . . . Every language has its genius, its scope, its limits. It is perilous to try to displace its centre, to venture to change its capital, even though one were Constantine. Chateaubriand was somewhat like the great emperor he celebrated ; he transferred the centre of prose from Rome to Byzantium. . . . Now the capital of a language thus pushed over to its extreme frontier is very near the barbarians.”¹

¹ *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire*, t. i, pp. 251-256 ; cf. also pp. 242, 243.

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Here is something that satisfies our modern sense of the problem more nearly than anything in Lessing. Suggestive word-painting is, within proper bounds, an entirely legitimate art; when it oversteps these bounds, when images are offered as a substitute for ideas, when words are turned to purely voluptuary uses and divorced from rational purpose, the result is not a real advance but rather the beginning of decadence. Keats prayed in his more callow days for a "life of sensations rather than thoughts." Many modern romanticists have aspired to live this life, and often with considerable success. We can trace with special clearness in the romanticism of nineteenth-century France this tendency toward a hypertrophy of sensation and an atrophy of ideas, toward a constantly expanding sensorium and a diminishing intellect. Judged by any standard Rousseau is a man of intellectual power, and he seems especially great in this respect when compared with Chateaubriand. Chateaubriand in turn appears an intellectual giant compared with Lamartine. Lamartine's ideas begin to look serious when compared with those of Hugo; Hugo himself strikes one as intellectually active com-

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pared with Paul Verlaine. Traces of cerebration may be discovered even in Verlaine compared with some of the later symbolists. In these last anæmic representatives of the school we arrive at something approaching a sheer intellectual vacuum, — the mere buzzing of the romantic chimera in the void. Such is the result of divorcing literature from rational purpose and reducing it to the quest of sensation; for it is the quest of sensation that is at the bottom of the whole movement, however much this quest may at any time assume the guise of a heavenly idealism. Sainte-Beuve distinguishes two main forms of sensuality in French writers of the nineteenth century. "The ones," he says, "disciples of René, have as it were concealed their sensuality behind a cloud of mysticism; the others have frankly unmasked it."¹

But I have already spoken of the peculiar use the romanticists made of imaginative illusion. It is a natural sequel to Rousseau's special conception of

¹ *Causeries du lundi*, ii, p. 459. Sainte-Beuve was himself a "disciple of René" in his novel *Volupté*. "Dans *Volupté*," he says, "je me suis donné l'illusion mystique pour colorer et *ennuager* l'épicurisme." (*Ibid.*, xvi, p. 43.)

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the original and the spontaneous joined to his contempt for rationality. The writer of the Rousseauistic type is no longer a thinker or a purposeful agent who is trying to give an account of his thoughts or his purpose to others, but an exquisitely organized mechanism for registering impressions and conveying them suggestively. Unfortunately the more successful the writer is in this pursuit of sensation for its own sake, the more intense and local his impressions become, the more closely they are likely to be related to the side of man and outer nature that is fugitive and evanescent, and the farther they are likely to be from what is of permanent appeal, from the normal, the representative, the human. We have curious testimony on this point from a writer who himself belongs to the school of sensation, though he did not achieve in his own style the refinements of what the French call *l'écriture artiste*. "The worst of it is," says Émile Zola, "that I have arrived at the conviction that the jargon of our period will be known as one of the most atrocious of the French language. . . . Look at Voltaire, with his dry style, his vigorous period, destitute of adjectives, which relates and does not

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paint; he remains eternally young. Look at Rousseau, who is our father — look at his imagery, his passionate rhetoric; he has written pages which are perfectly intolerable. . . . A cheerful fate awaits us who have outbidden Rousseau, who on the top of literature pile all the other arts — paint and sing our periods, chisel them as if they were blocks of marble, and require words to reproduce the perfume of things. All this titillates our nerves: we think it exquisite, perfect. But what will our great-grandchildren say to it?"

This passage does not altogether hit the mark. There are pages of Rousseau that are at least as assured of immortality as any of Voltaire's, and are at the same time filled with color and imagery. Art can stand plenty of fresh and vivid impressions, and indeed requires them, only they must be subordinated to something higher than themselves. What we have in the great artists is the intellectualizing of sensation, and not, as in the writers to whom Zola refers, the sensualizing of intellect. In his essay on Édouard Bertin, Taine expresses his regret that the romantic landscape-painters were more intent on the rendering of minute local impressions

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than on the broad intellectual purpose and total effect. And he notes how the special sensitiveness of the eye that they thus developed tended toward what I have called in a previous chapter hyperæsthesia. "Toward the end," he says, "the nervous and mental equilibrium was no longer intact even in the masters." In their successors the balance was still more completely lost and always in favor of "sensation, absorbing, physical, personal. Now that the experiment has been tried, the pathway that we have been following since 1830 is seen to have descended swiftly and by a steep declivity ; we are stumbling along it to-day, and that is even truer of painting with words than of painting with the brush." The reason is evident : for if a painter errs in taking a purely retinal view of painting, a poet errs still more grievously in taking a purely retinal — or auricular — view of poetry. This is plainly the case with Gautier when he praises as the finest in the French language certain verses of Hugo that are found on examination to be made up entirely of proper names ! In no great poet of the past do we have to lay primary stress, as we do in Hugo, on the special structure of the eye. He had an almost

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miraculous vision, at once telescopic and microscopic. But the extraordinary abundance and precision of his picturesque details are only too often the sign of the predominance of matter over spirit. In Hugo the idea if not absent altogether is usually the mere shadow of the image and not, as it should be, the soul. No other poet ever gave so tremendous an orchestration to such trifling themes. If not intellectual, Hugo's verse is at least emotional as well as pictorial. Gautier's verse, on the contrary, is almost purely pictorial. Perhaps more than any other writer ancient or modern he deliberately attempted to effect a *transposition d'art*, to rival with words the palette of the painter. He says of one of his short poems that only a frame is needed, and a hook to hang it on, to make of it a complete picture. His verse is as extraordinary for its visual suggestiveness as it is for its intellectual nullity.

The assertion has been made that Gautier's word-painting proves that Lessing was mistaken in the main thesis of the "Laokoon." This assertion can be only partially allowed. Lessing certainly does not do justice to one important side of the problem, — the rôle of imaginative illusion. He was interested

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less in the attenuated hypnosis that art may produce, than in art as related to intellect and action. Yet his main argument does not entirely lose its validity even in the case of the suggestive word-painter. The suggestive word-painter can merely stir into activity images that are already present consciously or subconsciously in the mind of another; even then it will be only a kindred image, not the same image as that of which the word-painter is himself dreaming or which he has actually before his eyes. For example, if the word-painter describes suggestively a mountain, a mountain may flash on the inner eye of the reader, though it will not be the same mountain as was before the actual or inner eye of the describer. If the word-painter describes suggestively some specific mountain, for instance Mont Blanc, and the reader has also seen Mont Blanc or a picture of it, then the visions in the minds of the word-painter and of the reader may come nearer to being identical. On the other hand, if a man were a good artist, but had never been in China or seen pictures of Chinese objects, would all the verbal magic of Loti's "Last Days of Peking" enable him to paint anything that really resembled

the Summer Palace? Let us suppose, again, that A wishes to paint suggestively, with words, an actual woman to B who has never seen her. He will succeed at most in evoking before the inner eye of B a dream-woman. Let us suppose also that B is a good artist and proceeds to paint his vision. Is it not evident that the painting will be no true likeness of the real woman? Frequently the word-painter will not even succeed in evoking a dream-image, but will lay himself open to the charge that Lessing brought against Ariosto's portrait of Alcina.

In writing about the Goncourts and their descriptive virtuosity Sainte-Beuve remarks on the objections that might be made to "this formidable encroachment of one art on another, this outrageous invasion of prose by pure painting." He cites as an example the description by the Goncourts of six women filing one after the other into a ball-room. In spite of the efforts of the writers to paint distinctly and separately these six heads, Sainte-Beuve complains that they do not succeed in making him see them. "I confuse them in spite of myself; six — it's too much for my somewhat feeble imagination; prose is not equal to the task. I should need to

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have the objects themselves before my eyes. There is plainly a confusion here between the means of expression of one art and those of another.”¹

To take an illustration from another order of sensations : when Kipling speaks of “the lift of the great Cape combers, and the smell of the baked Karroo,” the first part of the line may suggest an image to any one who is familiar with the sea. But the smell of the baked Karroo, though no doubt a very intense local impression for Kipling himself, will not really suggest anything to one who has not been in South Africa.

At best the art of verbal suggestion is, as Diderot already remarked, infinitely subtle and uncertain, and doubly subjective. An expression may have for some particular reader a suggestiveness that it did not have for its writer and may not have for other readers. Think of the gorgeous visions that the simple phrase *Consul Romanus* suggested to Thomas De Quincey — with the aid of opium. The “hieroglyphs” again, which the writer meant to charge with suggestiveness, may fail, and then instead of words that appeal to two senses at once, words, that

¹ *Nouveaux Lundis*, t. x, pp. 407, 408.

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as Rostand says, "you read with your ears and listen to with your eyes,"¹ you merely have words that follow one another inertly and are no better than the word-painting Lessing condemns. In short, even those who possess verbal magic are often unsuccessful, and for one true magician there are twenty pretenders.

I have not distinguished very sharply thus far between pictorial and musical suggestiveness; yet the art of suggesting colors or images is evidently very different from that of suggesting sounds. Though the two arts may coexist in one writer, they are more commonly found separate. The prose of Chateaubriand, for example, has both kinds of suggestiveness; but as we come down to more recent French writers we usually find that a sort of specialization has taken place. Thus Lamartine's soul "exhales itself like a sad and melodious strain," to use his own phrase. His poetry is comparatively poor in visual suggestiveness. Leconte de Lisle on

¹ La merveille

Du beau mot mystérieux,
C'est qu'on le lit de l'oreille,
Et qu'on l'écoute des yeux.

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the other hand, and most of the so-called *Parnassiens*, following more or less the lead of Gautier, carve or paint their verses and achieve an amazing degree of plastic precision. "The first concern of the man who writes in prose or verse," says Leconte de Lisle, "should be to set in relief the picturesque side of outer objects." Perhaps Heredia is the last distinguished figure in this group of *ciseleurs*. And then, after this precise evocation of forms and colors by the great virtuosos of description, there arises a craving for the infinitude of musical reverie that finds expression in the symbolistic movement, in writers like Verlaine or Mallarmé ("music above all," says Verlaine, in the first line of the poem that is taken to be the *credo* of the school). Mallarmé indulges in confusions of music and poetry that rival in extravagance what one finds a century earlier in Germany in the theory of Novalis and the practice of Tieck.¹

An interesting problem arises at this point: what is the difference between the legitimate music of verse and the music it attains by trespassing on the

¹ Cf., for example, the symphony in words published by Mallarmé in the defunct review *Cosmopolis*, vol. vi, pp. 417-427, with the "overture" to Tieck's comedy *Die verkehrte Welt*.

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domain of a sister art? In one sense no poets ever strove harder to write harmoniously than the neo-classic poets in France, beginning with Malherbe. In his commentary on Desportes, Malherbe shows himself an extraordinarily minute technician, and in nothing more than in this very matter of poetical harmony. He not only attacks hiatus, but rules out various combinations of vowels and consonants as being unmusical. The third-rate Waller enjoyed an almost first-rate reputation for having done for English poetry, as it was supposed, what Malherbe did for French,¹ for having polished English numbers and taught them to "flow sweetly." La Fontaine, one of the most consummate technicians in verse who ever lived, profited by Malherbe's teachings. The best English example of verse that is musical in the sense I have just been defining, musical, that is, by the subtle blending of vowels and consonants so as to avoid even the suspicion of cacophony, is probably Gray's "Elegy." Evidently the poet can do more than Gray has done, that is, transcend the

¹ In Soame's translation of Boileau's *Art poétique* (revised by Dryden) Waller is substituted for Malherbe and praised for having "changed hard discord to soft harmony."

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special harmony of his own art and attain the harmony of the musician, only by superinducing revery, by resorting to all the arts of suggestion. In "The Bells," for example, the iteration is intended to cast an almost hypnotic spell¹ upon the mind. In this poem Poe is already standing on the dangerous outer edge of what poetry can safely do. Mallarmé, and other French admirers of Poe, attempted to push on still further toward the Eldorado of musical suggestiveness, and in the attempt tumbled into chaos.²

We should perhaps add that so-called poetical prose may arise not only from confusing prose with poetry, but also from a reaching out of prose toward the domains of painting or music. One of the first

¹ In attempting to cast this spell the musically suggestive poet may fall into what from the point of view of ordinary poetical harmony is horrible cacophony. A good example is Tieck's *U-Romance* of Sir Wulf, who is carried off by the devil. As Brandes says (*Romantic School in Germany*, p. 119): "When the reader's nerves have been narcotized for half an hour [by this repetition of one vowel], when nothing but u-tu-tu is sounding in his ears, he has reached the climax, language has become music, and he floats off on the stream of an emotional mood."

² One should not overlook the encouragement that both the theory and practice of Wagner gave the French decadents in their confounding of music and poetry. Cf. J. Combarieu, *Les rapports de la musique et de la poésie*, pp. 341-343.

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examples of poetical prose in English, as something distinct from imaginative prose, is "Ossian," where this effect is attained by a somewhat crude mixture of the diction and cadences of poetry with those of prose. Far more truly romantic is the poetic prose of De Quincey, with its striving to suggest the harmonies of music. Leslie Stephen remarks that "the most exquisite passages in De Quincey's writing are all more or less attempts to carry out the idea expressed in the title of the dream-fugue. They are intended to be musical compositions, in which words have to play the part of notes."

Other writers of prose might be mentioned who are poetical by their intense pictorial suggestiveness. Poetic prose of the romantic type arises, like all other romantic confusions, from a stress of emotion that tends to overflow all formal boundaries; in its more refined forms it is the direct outcome of what I have called the dalliance of soul and sense in the tower of ivory. "Who of us," says Gautier, "has not dreamed of the miracle of poetic prose,¹ musical

¹ We should note that Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, one of the earliest examples in French of poetic prose in the modern sense, is a product of musical reverie.

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without rhythm and rhyme, sufficiently flexible to adapt itself to the lyrical impulses of the soul, the undulations of revery?" And he finds this miracle realized in the "Petits poèmes en prose" of Baudelaire, which, in their power to produce upon us "the sensation of a magnetic sleep that transports us far away from the real world," are comparable to the music of Weber.¹

We have thus far been chiefly studying the way in which the literature of the last century has turned to account all the resources of suggestion, in its attempts to do the work of music and painting. Something should be said at this point of the eagerness that music has displayed during the same period to become poetical and pictorial. For music, so far from showing a humdrum and homekeeping spirit, has kept pace with the other arts in its restless striving away from its own centre toward that doubtful periphery where it is on the point of passing over into something else.

2. PROGRAMME MUSIC

I take up with some trepidation the subject of programme music partly because of my own incom-

¹ Introduction to *Les Fleurs du mal* of Baudelaire.

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petence, partly because of the atmosphere of controversy that surrounds the whole subject. There is no agreement even in the definitions. Thus the "Oxford History" defines programme music (especially as developed by Berlioz and Liszt) as "a curious hybrid, i. e., music posing as an unsatisfactory kind of poetry."¹ Another authority makes his definition so broad as to conclude that "programme music is the only high-class music."² However defined, programme music enters into our present subject because it shows most clearly the drift of music along with the other arts toward impressionism. Indeed, the development of music during the last century has simply followed, usually at a considerable interval, the literary development. For example, much of the music of Richard Strauss and Debussy reflects moods that would already seem somewhat antiquated if expressed in literature. In music as elsewhere the nineteenth century was a period of vast and confused expansion. The virtues that were in request were the expansive virtues, not those of concentration.

¹ *Oxford History of Music*, vol. vi (by E. Dannreuther), p. 111.

² *Programme Music*, by Frederick Niecks, p. 537.

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We can easily trace the connection between modernism in music and the type of emotional expansion I have associated with Rousseau ; all the more easily in that Rousseau was a composer and a theorist about music, as well as a man of letters. In music, as in other fields, we can see him making his protest, in the name of freshness and spontaneity, against everything formal and disciplinary. In music, as in other fields, we can see the gradual yielding of the humanistic and religious points of view to the point of view of the sentimental naturalist ; the same growing emphasis on the individual, the characteristic, the expressive ; the same tendency to confuse the original with the bizarre, the paradoxical, the eccentric. Just as the romantic writer seeks to preserve the innocence of the mind, and the romantic painter the innocence of the eye, so the romantic musician strives to preserve the innocence of the ear, which often means in practice an ignorance of the great traditions of his art and an absence of serious reflection. Perhaps no one pushed this notion of originality farther than certain Russian composers. In his eagerness to get away from the conventional and the artificial, the roman-

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tic musician runs the same risk as the romantic writer of getting away at the same time from the normal, the representative, the human. There is the same complacent inbreeding in music as in literature, not only of personal but of local and national peculiarities. When Grieg was advised to make his next sonata less Norwegian, he replied defiantly, "On the contrary, the next shall be more so." Local color triumphed both in the nationalist form (as in Weber's "Freischütz," 1821), and in the quest of the strange and exotic (as in Félicien David's "Le Désert," 1844). Above all music has set itself to rendering the modern mood *par excellence*,—the mood of melting into outer nature. Music also reflects the suggestive interaction of all the sense-impressions upon one another. Schumann sought to give musical expression to Cologne Cathedral; Richard Strauss to Nietzsche's philosophy; Liszt to a poem of Hugo's or Schiller's; Huber set out to orchestrate one of Arnold Böcklin's pictures. Böcklin in turn had aimed in this picture to write with colors a "pantheistic nature-poem." We can thus follow the impressionistic ricochet from one art to the other. Music comes to be less inter-

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ested in its own proper harmonies than in working miracles of suggestiveness, — in painting tone-pictures, in writing tone-poems, or symphonic odes and ballads, in telling instrumental tales.

The common element in all the musical tendencies just enumerated may be summed up with sufficient accuracy as an increasing emphasis on musical expression as compared with musical form. Every one would probably agree that as a result of this modern movement music has become vastly more expressive ; it has attained in full measure the kind of spontaneity I have defined in speaking of Rousseau — whether this spontaneity appear in the rendering of the elementary moods of the folk, as often in Grieg, or in the rendering with lyrical intensity of the moods of the individual, as in Schumann and Chopin, who were as spontaneous in their own way as Heine and Shelley in theirs. As I have already said, in following out their spontaneity the romantic musicians were led, like the romantic writers, to a confused emotional synthesis, to feel correspondencies between man and outer nature, as well as between the different sense-impressions among themselves ; and therefore to interpret everything in terms of every-

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thing else through suggestion. The increased expressiveness of modern music has largely meant in practice that music has become more suggestive; and both the use and abuse of this new suggestiveness appear most clearly in programme music.

It is a striking fact not sufficiently noticed by historians of music that, in a passage I have already quoted (page 123), Rousseau not only emphasizes the suggestive power of music as no one perhaps had done before him, but gives a definition of programme music that is possibly still unsurpassed, adding concrete examples of the things that music may suggest. In view of Rousseau's great influence in Germany the programmatic symphony entitled "*Portrait musical de la nature*," published by J. H. Knecht in 1784, may have been an attempt to put in practice some of Rousseau's ideas; and Knecht's programme in turn probably had some influence on Beethoven in the composition of his "*Pastoral Symphony*." Rousseau aimed to express the dream of pastoral simplicity in both his music and his writing, but it is only in his writing that he was fully successful. The Arcadian revery that is the soul of all that is most poetical in Rousseau does not attain full musical

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expression until Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony," or full expression in painting until the landscapes of Corot. In rendering suggestively the sights and sounds of outer nature Beethoven apparently had some uneasiness as to the peril of thus working away from the centre of his art—from absolute music—toward its frontiers. He wrote in the sub-title of one of the copies of the "Pastoral Symphony": "Expressive of feeling rather than painting." And in one of his note-books we read: "All painting in instrumental music if pushed too far is a failure." We may agree with him, however, that he has not overstepped the proper bounds in the "Pastoral Symphony." But it could hardly be expected that the Titans of the romantic movement would preserve this balance between musical form and the yearning for an ampler expression. They tend to run together emotionally music and the other arts, after the fashion we have already observed in literature.

We may take as an example of this emotional unrestraint and at the same time of the romantic personality *par excellence*, Hector Berlioz, who happens also to be, with the possible exception of Liszt, the most important figure in the history of pro-

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gramme music. We should note, first of all, the weakness of Berlioz and in general of the whole modern school in devotional music, in the expression of what is above the reason with the accompanying sense of awe and elevation and restraint. Thus the "Requiem Mass," composed by Berlioz in 1836-37, is mainly noise and sensationalism. According to Dannreuther, "no such volume of sound had been heard in Paris since the taking of the Bastille,"¹ — enough to raise the dead instead of contributing to their repose.

What we evidently have in Berlioz is not an illumination from above, but an insurrection from below, and he is most himself in what may be termed insurrectional music, — for instance, the Orgy of Brigands (*allegro frenetico*) in his "Harold en Italie." Berlioz has the true romantic instinct for attitudinizing : he pushes himself to the front of the stage, and proceeds to paint and act what was most intense in his own emotional life. He was thus led to compose the most famous of his pieces of programme music, the "Symphonie fantastique" (*Épisode de la vie d'un artiste*). What the episode was we may infer from

¹ *Oxford History of Music*, vol. vi, p. 174.

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the passages in his journal where he supplements his musical confession. He there tells of his "infernal passion" for the English or rather Irish actress, Miss Henrietta Smithson, that led to the following scene between them: —

"She reproached me with not loving her. Thereupon, tired of all this, I answered her by poisoning myself before her eyes. Terrible cries of Henrietta. Sublime despair! Atrocious laughter on my part. Desire to revive on seeing her terrible protestations of love. Emetic!"

Like his contemporary Hugo, Berlioz has been accused of a partiality, if not for the ugly, at least for the colossal and the misshapen. To both the poet and the composer the epithet "Polyphemish" has been applied. What is plain is that in many of these modern composers the laws of structure are relaxed, and musical harmony and proportion sacrificed to a stormy impressionism. The same disregard for beauty as compared with expressiveness which we have found in Berlioz is likewise seen in Liszt. The strain that they both put upon musical form is due to their desire to render things that do not come directly within the domain of music. We

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read in Dannreuther: "In pieces such as the first and last movements of Berlioz's 'Symphonie fantastique,' the first and last movements of his symphony 'Harold en Italie,' Liszt's *Poèmes symphoniques*, 'Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne,' after a poem by Victor Hugo, and 'Die Ideale,' after a poem by Schiller, the hearer is bewildered by a series of startling orchestral effects which are not explicable on any principle of musical design."¹ This is so, because in producing these effects the composer was not primarily intent on musical design: he was really devising "hieroglyphs," or symbols, that are not to be estimated first of all for their value as music, but rather for their power to set one dreaming of poetry or pictures, or history or drama, or even philosophy. For example, what is the musical value of the crash of sound with which Berlioz symbolizes the fall of the axe on the neck of the victim in his "Marche au supplice" ("Symphonie fantastique"); or of the piercing, dissonant, high trumpet note by which the fatal sword thrust is represented in the tone-poem of Richard Strauss, "Don Juan"? To ask such questions is to answer them.

¹ *Oxford History of Music*, vol. vi, p. 11.

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Besides, musical suggestiveness is even more uncertain and subjective than suggestiveness in literature. We read of two persons who, on hearing one of Schubert's marches, had an almost identical vision of eighteenth-century Spain. But it is exceptional for music, unless accompanied by a very detailed programme, to suggest similar images to different individuals. The constant menace that hangs over the whole ultra-impressionistic school is an incomprehensible symbolism. Many persons will sympathize with the man who waxed enthusiastic over the way Richard Strauss had reproduced in one of his tone-poems the whistling of the wind through the arms of a mill, but was told that what the master had really tried to render in this passage was the bleating of a flock of sheep! In general, primary emphasis on suggestiveness in music plunges one into an abyss of subjectivity. A piece of music that is meaningless for one, may be for another the magic key that unlocks the palace of dreams. Mozart is intrinsically beautiful; but Gérard de Nerval declares that he would give the whole of Mozart, and Rossini and Weber into the bargain, for a certain old tune that conjured up before his inner eye a

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seventeenth-century château and the woman he had perhaps seen there in a former existence.¹

It would be easy enough to show that music has always been more or less programmatic and suggestive. The romanticists developed infinitely the art of musical suggestiveness, using it especially to relate man to outer nature, but they did not by any means invent it. The great musicians of the past were not pedants and formalists, and only pedants

¹ The lines in which Gérard de Nerval describes the suggestive power of music are worth quoting for their poetical charm and suggestiveness :—

FANTAISIE

Il est un air pour qui je donnerais
Tout Rossini, tout Mozart, tout Weber,
Un air très vieux, languissant et funèbre,
Qui pour moi seul a des charmes secrets.

Or, chaque fois que je viens à l'entendre,
De deux cents ans mon âme rajeunit ;
C'est sous Louis treize . . . et je crois voir s'étendre
Un coteau vert que le couchant jaunit.

Puis un château de brique à coins de pierres,
Aux vitraux teints de rougeâtres couleurs,
Ceint de grands parcs, avec une rivière
Baignant ses pieds, qui coule entre les fleurs.

Puis une dame à sa haute fenêtre,
Blonde, aux yeux noirs, en ses habits anciens . . .
Que dans une autre existence, peut-être,
J'ai déjà vue ! . . . et dont je me souviens.

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and formalists would desire music so "absolute" as to exclude entirely poetical and pictorial suggestion. In itself suggestion in music, though even more difficult than in literature, is, if successful, delightful and legitimate. But even if successful the question remains with what measure it is employed and to what purpose. Many modern musicians have laid themselves open to the charge of being expressive but aimless. They are in danger of resembling the writer of whom it was said that he could express anything he wished, — unluckily he had nothing to express ; or they may be likened to a painter who is an accomplished colorist but has no design. Too often they have reveled in their colors and impressions without trying to subordinate them to anything higher. They have displayed the same intemperance in this respect as the romantic word-painters, and exposed themselves to the same criticism ; they have dwelt too much in an outlying province of their art instead of at its centre. As Sainte-Beuve would say, they have transferred the capital of music from Rome to Byzantium ; and when the capital of an empire is thus pushed over to its extreme frontier it is very close to the barbarians. Moreover,

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the barbarism that menaces modern music as well as the other arts is often the most dangerous kind—that which rises from over-refinement.

3. COLOR-AUDITION

The more extreme forms of romantic word-painting and programme music, indeed most of the more extreme forms of suggestiveness, are closely allied to color-audition. For example, the famous tone-picture of the dawn in Félicien David's "Le Désert" would, we may suppose, be more fully appreciated by one who instinctively relates light and sound,—for whom habitually "the sun comes up like thunder."¹ The hero of a recent novel,² to whom everything, including the moral law and its mandates, suggests sounds arrayed in analogical colors, appropriately engages in composing programme music. Certain suggestive word-painters, again, assert that the vowels have for them distinct

¹ Compare with Kipling's phrase Baudelaire's description of the rising sun "comme une explosion nous lançant son bonjour." It is curious to discover traces of advanced Rousseauistic sensibility in a writer who has often been taken as a type of Anglo-Saxon sturdiness.

² *Violetta*, by the Baroness von Hutten.

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colors, and write for readers like themselves,—readers in the depths of whose sensibility these vowels will reverberate in musical iridescences. The colored drawings exhibited in Boston not long ago of portions of Schumann's and Beethoven's music¹ also appear to imply color-audition in an acute stage if they really live up to their titles. Color-audition indeed seems to give a definite physiological basis to that running together of all the different impressions, that mystical synthetic sense, of which the modern æsthete dreams,—the sense that “sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches, all in one.”² It is this sense, no doubt, that one will need to enjoy Wagner's “art work of the future,” his *Gesammtkunst*, in which all the separate arts are to melt together voluptuously.

The latest dictionary of music dismisses color-audition curtly by the remark that “Rousseau's ‘Essay on the Origin of Language,’ . . . gives the germ of subsequent absurdities regarding the alleged analogies between tones and colors.”³ Rousseau says

¹ No. 20 in the catalogue I have of this collection is appropriately entitled “This way madness lies.”

² Sidney Lanier.

³ Stokes' *Encyclopædia of Music*, by L. J. de Bekker, p. 567.

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in this essay, it is true, that "sounds are never more effective than when they produce the impression of colors"; and he is evidently on the way, like Diderot, to all our modern confusions. Yet I for one should hesitate to say in this particular matter, *c'est la faute à Rousseau*. Locke speaks of a blind person for whom the sound of a trumpet was scarlet, and there are very likely earlier references that have escaped me. Indeed, if color-audition has as firm a physiological basis as is sometimes asserted, it may well be as old as human nature itself. Whatever we may think of color-audition in general, it begins to have literary importance only with the advent of modern impressionism. The question naturally arises how far it is connected with the hyperæsthesia that is so often found in this whole movement. I do not care to maintain that color-audition is always a sign of an abnormally heightened sensibility. This is a question I prefer to leave to the specialists. So far as my own observation goes, I should say that the habit of interpreting sounds in terms of color may exist without any special hyperæsthesia, but that the habit of interpreting light or color in terms of sound is nearly

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always a sign of nervous disorder. But as I have already said, color-audition has found literary expression only in those who belong to what we may term the neurotic school. It manifests itself in connection with the melomania of the German romanticists, their tendency not only to worship music but to reduce to music all the other arts. The writings of Tieck, for example, already exhibit it in a very acute form. In "Zerbino," he writes of flowers, "their colors sing, their forms resound, . . . color, fragrance, song, proclaim themselves one family." In his "Magelone," the music dies away "like a stream of blue light." In E. T. A. Hoffmann we have a confusion of the sense-impressions that is still more plainly pathological. These confusions came to him especially in the state between sleeping and waking. On such occasions, he writes, "particularly when I have heard a great deal of music, there takes place in me a confusion of colors, sounds, and perfumes. It is as though they all sprang up mysteriously together from the same ray of light and then united to form a marvelous concert. The perfume of dark red carnations acts upon me with extraordinary and magic

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power. I fall involuntarily into a dream state, and then hear as though at a great distance the sound of a horn rising and dying away." In his sketch entitled "Kreisler's Musical, Poetical Club," he has attempted to work out the correspondencies between sounds and colors. "The fragrance" [i. e., of the music], he says in one passage in this sketch, "shimmered in flaming, mysteriously interwoven circles."

Hoffmann, we may note in passing, was an avowed Rousseauist. He writes in his journal when only twenty-nine (13 February, 1804): "I am reading the 'Confessions' of Rousseau possibly for the thirtieth time." (He had read them for the first time at the age of fourteen.) "I find that I am very much like him." Hoffmann, indeed, and other Germans drew the extreme consequences from Rousseauism and thus anticipated the French decadents.

Color-audition and allied phenomena do not appear to any great extent in the earlier French romanticists. We learn almost by chance that Alfred de Musset associated colors with sounds, a peculiarity that can scarcely be said to have affected his poetry; though his poetry contains, of course, abun-

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dant evidence of hyperæsthesia. In a letter to Madame Jaubert he writes that he very much regretted having to argue with his family to prove that *fa* was yellow, *sol* red, a soprano voice blonde, a contralto voice brunette. He thought that these things went without saying. But it is only with Baudelaire that this confusion of the sense-impressions assumes importance. Baudelaire dreams of a "mystical metamorphosis of all his senses fused into one," and comes within measurable distance of attaining it. For instance, in the sonnet I have already quoted he says: "There are perfumes fresh as the flesh of babes, sweet as hautboys, green as meadows, and others, corrupt, rich, and triumphant, having the expansiveness of infinite things, like amber, musk, benjamin, and incense, which sing the transports of the spirit and senses." It is a pity that Baudelaire did not also taste the perfumes in this passage, for then he would have arrived at a complete jumble of all the five senses, and of flesh and spirit into the bargain. Baudelaire was always on the outlook for the symbolizing of sound in color. Thus we are told, when Wagner in person was striving to conquer Paris, Baudelaire, who was in

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full sympathy with the new music, was invited to hear him play the piano. Wagner began in a blue dressing-gown; after a time he changed to a yellow gown; and finally to a green one. When he had finished Baudelaire expressed sincere satisfaction but added diffidently that he would like to ask a question. Did the change of color in the dressing-gown symbolize anything in the music? Wagner looked sharply to see if the Frenchman were making fun of him. But when persuaded of his good faith, he explained that playing so warmed him up that he had a change of gowns from heavier to lighter ready to hand; the colors were mere accident.¹

Baudelaire would almost seem to have arrived at the "ultimate dim Thule" of refined sensation; but some of his disciples pushed on still further into the region of the rare and the remote. We may take as representing this last stage of the movement, J. K. Huysmans, and his novel "*A Rebours*" (1884). In writing this novel Huysmans was evidently influenced strongly, not only by Baudelaire, but by

¹ I borrow this anecdote from the *Nation* (New York), 17 December, 1908.

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Poe. It makes clear to us indeed why Poe is the only American author who has had an important influence in France: he was the only American author who was not merely romantic, but ultra-romantic, who had the type of sensibility we have been studying in Rousseau and his descendants. How could Baudelaire and his group fail to be fascinated by such passages as the one in the "Colloquy of Monos and Una" where Poe describes the experience of a person who has already ceased to breathe without as yet having ceased entirely to feel. "The senses, indeed," says the spirit who relates this experience, speaking of course from another state of being, "the senses were unusually active although eccentrically so, assuming each other's functions at random. The taste and smell were inextricably confounded and became one sentiment, abnormal and intense. The rays of light of the candles set in the death-chamber affected me only as sound. Issuing from the flame of each lamp, for there were many, there flowed unbrokenly into my ears a strain of melodious monotone."

Huysmans then, as I have said, was inspired to write "A Rebours" not only by Baudelaire, but by

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Poe, — especially by the tale entitled “The Imp of the Perverse,” and by the account Poe gives of the habits of M. Auguste Dupin. The title of the novel, “A Rebours,” means that its hero, Des Esseintes, is exactly opposed in all his opinions and behavior to the rest of the world. His twofold passion is first, to make faces at the bourgeois; second, “to enwrap himself,” as Poe puts it, “in an exquisite sense of the strange.” He reduces life to art, and art to sensation, and sensation itself to an endeavor to achieve in revery a sort of musical synthesis of the various sense-impressions. To this end he arranges for himself in a lonely suburb of Paris “a bower of dreams,” so organized that he may play symphonic variations on his different senses and extract from them the maximum of refined enjoyment. For example, Des Esseintes built into the wall of his dining-room a cupboard containing a series of small kegs arranged side by side, and each having a little silver spigot at the bottom. He connects these spigots with one another so as to form a kind of key-board on which he can play his mouth-organ. “The organ happened to be open. The little drawers labeled flute, horn, *voix céleste*, were

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drawn out ready to be operated. Des Esseintes drank a drop here and there, played inner symphonies for himself, succeeded in procuring for himself in his throat sensations analogous to those that music pours into the ear." Furthermore, every *liqueur* corresponds in taste, according to Des Esseintes, to the sound of a musical instrument. Curaçao corresponds to the clarinet; kummel to the nasal oboe; mint and anisette to the flute, both peppery and sweet; kirsch to the fierce blast of a trumpet; gin and whiskey to strident cornets and trombones, etc. Moreover, tonal relations exist in the music of *liqueurs*. Thus the benedictine stands as the relative minor of that major of alcohols known as green chartreuse.

"These principles once admitted, Des Esseintes had succeeded, thanks to erudite experiments, in playing upon his tongue silent melodies, mute funereal marches grandly spectacular; in hearing in his mouth solos of mint, duos of vespéto and rum."

But that evening, Huysmans concludes, Des Esseintes had no desire to "listen to the taste of music." He does, however, indulge himself later in a concert of perfumes; each perfume evoking for

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his inner eye its appropriate vision. Des Esseintes speaks confidently of these correspondencies as being generally valid. But is this the case? Can the same perfume be counted on to suggest the same vision to any two persons, or indeed to suggest anything at all? This is the crux of the whole matter. In 1902 there was given at New York in the Carnegie Lyceum the "first experimental perfume concert in America," which included among its attractions "a trip to Japan in sixteen minutes," conveyed to the audience by a series of odors. But any attempt of this kind to arrive at a collective bower of dreams, to have a whole audience respond in a similar manner to olfactory suggestiveness is foredoomed to failure. It is likely to appeal not to the audience's sense of smell, but to a far more wholesome sense,—its sense of humor. And this I understand is what happened in the New York experiment.

A like attempt to suggest colors by sounds or vice versa would have the same fate. These supposed correspondencies are involved in hopeless subjectivity. If we go through the testimony of people in the habit of seeing sounds and hearing

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colors, we shall find that to one the flute seemed red, to another sky-blue ; for one the trumpet was scarlet, for another green, and so on. In his celebrated sonnet Arthur Rimbaud declares that the vowel *a* is black, *e* white, *i* red, *u* green, *o* blue.¹ To René Ghil, however, the vowels suggest very different colors, *o*, as he maintains, being not blue but red ; a point disputed by these "exquisite invalids," as Anatole France calls them, "under the indulgent eye of M. Mallarmé." Here as elsewhere the last stage of romantic suggestiveness is an incomprehensible symbolism. Attempts such as were made at Paris a few years ago to found a school of art on color-audition must remain forever vain. Color-audition and similar phenomena have little bearing on the higher and more humane purposes of art. For the critic of art and literature they are interesting and curious, but scarcely anything more. They concern more immediately the student of psychology and medicine, and in some cases the nerve-specialist.

As a matter of fact the hero of Huysmans, after

¹ A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes, etc.

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all his "erudite experiments" on himself, finally collapses at the close of the book into the arms of a nerve-specialist. In himself Des Esseintes is, as M. Lemaître remarks, only a "very complicated ass"; but he is more than usually significant in his asininity. Des Esseintes is a suitable symbol of the end of an art that refuses to go beyond the quest of sensation, and seeks to enhance this sensation by throwing over it the glamour of imaginative illusion. As marking the supreme exaggerations of his school, his mouth-organ is equally symptomatic, as I have said elsewhere, with the color-clavichord of Father Castel. In reducing everything to suggestion Des Esseintes merely expresses in his own way what is more and more a universal tendency. We are living in an age that has gone mad on the powers of suggestion in everything from its art to its therapeutics. Even the art of dancing has caught the contagion, and is not content to count simply as dancing but must needs be a symbol and suggestion of something else, of a Greek vase, for example, or a Beethoven symphony. If all the arts are thus restless and impressionistic, the reason is not far to seek: it is because the people who practice these

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arts and for whom they are practiced are themselves living in an impressionistic flutter. If the arts lack dignity, centrality, repose, it is because the men of the present have no centre, no sense of anything fixed or permanent either within or without themselves, that they may oppose to the flux of phenomena and the torrent of impressions. In a word, if confusion has crept into the arts, it is merely a special aspect of a more general malady, of that excess of sentimental and scientific naturalism¹ from which, if my diagnosis is correct, the occidental world is now suffering. It remains, therefore, for us to consider whether there is any means by which we may react in just measure against this naturalism, — by which we may recover humanistic standards without ceasing to be vital and spontaneous, or in any way reverting to formalism.

¹ I have attempted a definition of these terms in *Literature and the American College*. (Essay on "Bacon and Rousseau.")

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I. THE LIMITS OF NATURALISM

THE theories about art and literature that we have been reviewing in this book seem in the retrospect a sort of oscillation between extremes: we have seen the impressionistic extreme follow the extreme of formalism, the pseudo-Platonists succeed the pseudo-Aristotelians; we have seen the neo-classicists confuse the arts objectively (usually in terms of painting), and the romanticists confuse them subjectively (frequently in terms of music). "It is the privilege of the ancients," says Lessing, "never in any matter to do too much or too little." Man is fond of looking on himself as a lover of the truth; but in tracing historically a subject like the present we are often tempted to pronounce him rather a lover of half-truths. Of course most men cannot be said to love in any effective sense even half-truths, but are hungry above all for illusions. Nor do the

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illusions need to be very complicated, — the simplest illusions of sense usually suffice. A little vanity and a little sensuality, says a disdainful French moralist, is about all that enters into the make-up of the average man. Even so there is something to be said for the point of view of the average man. He often derives more satisfaction from his frank surrender to the illusions of life, — to what Erasmus would have called his folly, — than the philosopher from his painful gropings for the truth. “In Folly’s cup still laughs the bubble Joy.”

If the philosopher does win a glimpse of something beyond the almost impenetrable veil of illusion, he is liable to take for the truth what is at best only a half-truth, and so grows one-sided and fanatical. The half-truth often gets itself formulated and imposed tyrannically upon the world, and men continue to hold fast to it long after it has served its purpose, when emphasis is needed rather on some opposite aspect of the truth. This is a chief form of that blindness in human nature that the great Greek poets saw so clearly, — the desperate tenacity with which men cling to their half-truths and fail to see the approaching shadow of Nemesis. Indeed, one

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might say in this sense that it would be easy enough for man to guard against his vices if he could only be saved from the excess of his virtues.

The tenacity with which man clings to his half-truths is due not merely to conviction but also to supineness. Man has always been ready to justify his exclusive allegiance to the half-truth that happens to be in fashion by some one of the innumerable sophistries by which he has flattered his ancient indolence. In fact, as Sir Joshua Reynolds says, there is scarcely any expedient to which man will not resort in order to "evade and shuffle off real labor, — the real labor of thinking." Sir Joshua showed that he himself was on his guard against the neo-classical supineness when he says that he avoided making copies, because making copies "requires no effort of mind" and gets one into the "dangerous habit of imitating without selecting, and laboring without a determinate object." For the neo-classical indolence of mechanical imitation the romanticist substituted the indolence of revery — of a spontaneity that has only to let itself go. Wordsworth would have us believe that to become wise a man needs merely to sit down on an "old gray stone"

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and "dream his time away." And Wordsworth of course glimpses here an important half-truth, but a half-truth at least as dangerous in itself as the neo-classic half-truth about the copying of models. Moreover, the romantic indolence resembles the neo-classic indolence in having no "determinate object" and in not being truly selective.

Man is therefore a living paradox in that he holds with enthusiasm and conviction to the half-truth and yet becomes perfect only in proportion as he achieves the rounded view. The essence of any true humanistic method is the mediation between extremes, a mediation that demands of course not only effective thinking but effective self-discipline; and that, no doubt, is why true humanists have always been so rare. We are not to suppose that because a man has made some progress in mediating between opposite virtues and half-truths he has therefore arrived at the truth. The Truth (with a capital T) is of necessity infinite and so is not for any poor finite creature like man. The most any man can do is to tend toward the truth, but the portion of it he has achieved at any given moment will always, compared with what still remains, be a mere

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glimpse and an infinitesimal fragment. If he attempts to formulate this glimpse, the danger is that it will thus be frozen into a false finality. Any one who thinks he has got the Truth finally tucked away in a set of formulæ, is merely suffering, whether he call himself theologian, or scientist, or philosopher, from what may be termed the error of intellectualism or the metaphysical illusion. But though the truth cannot be finally formulated, man cannot dispense with formulæ. The truth will always overflow his categories, yet he needs categories. He should therefore have formulæ and categories, but hold them fluidly; in other words, he must have standards, but they must be flexible; he must have faith in law, but it must be a vital faith.

The neo-classic theorists whom we studied in the early part of this book evidently had a faith in law that was too stark and literal; in a world of flux and relativity they tried to set up changeless formulæ. Boileau, for example, speaks of the literary *genres* as though they were fixed from everlasting to everlasting. Lessing, again, shows too rigid a sense of law when he asserts that Aristotle's "Poetics" is as infallible as Euclid; he should at least have allowed

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for the possibilities of non-Euclidean geometry. Lessing's perception of the laws of the drama, though too rigidly formulated, is in its own way vital, whereas what we found in many earlier Aristotelians was a somewhat Jesuitical revamping of the theological spirit and its application to literature. Under this influence the conception of law ceased to be fluid and vital and was petrified into the mechanical rule.

Most of the neo-classic rules in themselves point the way to a very important set of half-truths,—the half-truths that dawned on the men of the Renaissance when they had their glimpse of the antique symmetry. The contrast between the masterpieces of Greece and Rome and the works of the Middle Ages seemed to the Renaissance the contrast between form and formlessness. Even a Leonardo regretted his failure to recover the antique symmetry, but he at least imitated the ancients vitally; whereas many of the Aristotelian casuists held out the hope that the antique symmetry might be recovered by imitating the ancients outwardly and mechanically.

In the name of form as they conceived it, the casuists carried on a campaign against the mediæval romances, a campaign that deserves to be more care-

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fully studied than it has been hitherto, by some one who is at once an exact scholar and a man of ideas.¹ The gist of this attack on the romances is that they are lacking in unity, measure, purpose, as the casuists understood these terms. The romances begin anywhere and leave off anywhere; have no art of omission or selection; no subordination of incident to some definite end. Thus Ariosto, instead of dealing with a single important action of one hero, promises at the beginning of his poem to sing of ladies and knights and arms and heaven knows what else, — in short, a mere jumble of romantic adventure. And so Ariosto is condemned by many of the casuists, and Tasso praised as being nearer to the antique symmetry; whereas, judged by the psychological test, the only test that has value in such matters, Ariosto is, of course, very much nearer the ancients than Tasso. In other words, the casuists did not go beneath the surface; they were for having art and literature carefully restrained, highly unified,

¹ Professor Spingarn (*Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, pp. 112-124) has given a summary of this debate between the partisans of epic and romance. As I have pointed out elsewhere (p. 74), one of the weapons used in attacking the romances and proving their lack of purpose was the idea of "probability."

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supremely purposeful ; but in interpreting their restraint and unity and purpose they failed to distinguish between form and formalism. Moreover, the neo-classical creed took definite shape during a period of concentration, a concentration that was itself more formal than vital ; and so in the imitation of the ancients emphasis was laid almost entirely on the virtues of concentration, and not, as might have been the case in the earlier Renaissance, on the expansive virtues as well.

Consequently, when the forces of expansion again prevailed, the neo-classic rules came to be felt as mere artificiality and convention, as a mortal constraint on everything that is vital and spontaneous. There took place one of those violent oscillations from one set of half-truths to another that are not uncommon in the history of mankind and that Luther compares to the swayings of a drunken peasant on horseback. The romantic movement was inspired, even more than most movements, by the ambition to be the very opposite of everything that had gone before. The neo-classic school had converted the ideas of unity and measure and purpose and of law itself into mere formalism ; the romanticists in getting rid

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of formalism were for getting rid at the same time of the ideas of unity and measure and purpose and law itself. They would be aimless and lawless and live in a perpetual paradox. For example, a play of Tieck's, with its hashing together of different arts and its mixture of various *genres*, epic, lyric, etc., is a deliberate defiance of all the laws that had been supposed to govern the drama; and though in theory we may grant that these laws are not absolute, in practice it is about as sensible for any one aiming at true dramatic effect to fly in the face of them in the way Tieck has done, as it would be to fly in the face of the law of gravitation, which according to the latest school of physics is not to be taken absolutely, either.

A great deal has been said about the lawlessness and aimlessness of the German romanticists in particular, but in this respect as in many others they were anticipated by Rousseau, who already expresses, and with a more consummate art than that possessed by many of his disciples, the mood of vagabondage, the joy of emancipation from any definite purpose that is so pervasive in modern literature. "I love," says Rousseau, "to busy myself with mere nothings; to begin a hundred things and finish no one of them; to

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go and come as the whim takes me; to change my plans every instant; to follow a fly in all its movements; to turn up a stone to see what is under it; to undertake ardently a task that would require ten years and give it up without regret at the end of ten minutes; in fine, to muse all the day long without order and sequence, and to follow in all things only the caprice of the moment." If we contrast with this passage Aristotle's saying that the end is the chief thing of all, we shall have the two most divergent views imaginable of life and art.

Rousseau, as he never tires of telling us, has a horror of every constraint upon his emotional impulse. He does not spurn merely certain special barriers and limitations but all barriers and limitations whatsoever. When he speaks of liberty, he does not mean, as a typical Englishman (let us say Burke) would mean, liberty defined and limited by law, but an undefined liberty that is tempered only by sympathy, which in turn is tempered by nothing at all. An undefined liberty and an unselective sympathy are the two main aspects of the movement initiated by Rousseau — the poles between which it oscillates. Some Rousseauists have exalted sympathy almost to

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the exclusion of liberty, others have exalted liberty almost to the exclusion of sympathy, and others again have exalted both sympathy and liberty. At the very sound of the words love and liberty they would have us swept off our feet by a wave of enthusiasm, and indeed look on it as almost sacrilegious to submit these words to a cool examination. But what are we to think of love and liberty that would set themselves above every law, especially the highest law of which man has finite knowledge, the law of measure? This conception of love and liberty may very well cease to be a virtue and become a disease. Inasmuch as the word anarchy has come to have a somewhat special connotation, we may call this disease, for lack of a better term, eleutheromania.

Eleutheromania may be defined as the instinct to throw off not simply outer and artificial limitations, but all limitations whatsoever. For example, Friedrich Schlegel is an eleutheromaniac when he says that the "caprice of the poet will suffer no law above itself." To any great poet of the past, to Dante for instance, such an utterance would have seemed a horrible blasphemy, and Dante would not have been far mistaken. Tolstoy, again, is an eleu-

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theromaniac in his notion of sympathy ; Nietzsche, in his notion of liberty. These two men, indeed, stand at what I have defined as the opposite poles of Rousseauism. Of course, it is an infinitely delicate task to determine how far any particular man has fallen into excess in his emphasis on love or liberty. There is plainly eleutheromania in Byron's idea of liberty, as there is in Shelley's idea of sympathy ; but this eleutheromania had at least some justification as a protest against a counter-excess of Toryism in the society of their time. Nowadays the excess is of a very different kind : society is plainly suffering from a lack rather than a superabundance of discipline and restraint. Many of the greatest of our modern artists, Hugo, Wagner, Ibsen, etc., have been eleuthero-maniacs. For over a century the world has been fed on a steady diet of revolt. Everybody is becoming tinged with eleutheromania, taken up with his rights rather than with his duties, more and more unwilling to accept limitations. We all know how perilous it is to suggest to the modern woman that she has any " sphere " ; and, indeed, if man is to be an eleuthero-maniac it is hard to see why woman should be denied the same privilege. The present prospect is

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that society will get its fingers badly burned before it learns to distinguish between true freedom and brotherhood and the freedom and brotherhood that are only a special form of the Rousseauistic art of making madness beautiful.

We should have the courage to affirm in the face of most contemporary opinion that a man may throw off the outer law only in the name of a higher law, and not in the name of universal sympathy. We should note the difference in this respect between the art of Richard Wagner and the art of the Greeks, the spirit of which he claims to be reviving. According to Wagner, as we have seen, the arts are to melt voluptuously together, inspired by the spirit of freedom. What we actually have in the Greek drama is a flexible interplay of the different arts and *genres* that is governed by an exquisite restraint. As André Chénier says in speaking of Greek art, "No *genre* escaping from its prescribed boundaries would have dared to trespass on the frontiers of another."¹

¹ La nature dicta vingt genres opposés,
D'un fil léger entre eux, chez les Grecs, divisés.
Nul genre, s'échappant de ses bornes prescrites,
N'aurait osé d'un autre envahir les limites.

L'Invention.

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Wagner shows something akin to effrontery in his attempt to turn the story of Antigone into a humanitarian symbol.¹ Antigone, says Wagner, opposes to the harsh laws of the state, a love for all mankind. But in reality if Antigone violates the edicts of Creon it is only, as she asserts, that she may obey laws still higher and more sacred, —

Unwritten laws, eternal in the heavens.
Not of to-day or yesterday are these,
But live from everlasting, and from whence
They sprang, none knoweth.²

In short, as depicted by Sophocles, Antigone is not an eleutheromaniac but a civilized woman. The sense one has of vital law as something distinct from either outer authority or the impulses of temperament may be taken in general as the highest, perhaps the only true, test of civilization.

Of course, I should not assert that a deliberate revolt against both the inner and the outer law has marked the whole of the modern movement. Only one side of this movement—the side I have associated with Rousseau—has been deliberately an-

¹ *Opera and Drama* (Ellis's translation), pp. 183 ff.

² *Antigone*, 453 ff. Cf. also *Œdipus Rex*, 865 ff.

archistic, and the movement has been too vast to be completely represented by any one man or set of men. Yet we should not overlook certain consequences of the drift toward a naturalistic conception of life that has been visible during the past hundred years, and indeed more or less since the Renaissance. One of these results has been a weakening of the idea of a law for human nature as something distinct from the law for physical nature. "There are two laws, discrete, not reconciled," says Emerson, — "Law for man, and law for thing." But for the pure naturalist there is only one law, the law for thing. Now any one who thus identifies man with phenomenal nature, whether scientifically or sentimentally, is almost inevitably led to value only the virtues of expansion; for according to natural law, to grow is to expand. Diderot's contemporaries spoke of him as an *expansive* man; in this respect Diderot, like Rousseau, was a true ancestor of the nineteenth century. All the men who were typically of the nineteenth century were expansive men. Think, for example, how purely expansive Dickens was in his view of life, and how in spite of his undoubted genius his art suffers from this excess of

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expansiveness. The sentimental naturalist wishes to expand emotionally, and is averse to anything that would set a bound to emotion. The scientific naturalist would go on increasing forever in knowledge and power, and eyes askance anything that seems to fix limits to this increase.

Yet in spite of the naturalists, scientific and sentimental, we must insist not only that there is a law for man as well as a law for thing, but that the actual reason may be given why the two laws are discrete and unreconciled. If man as a natural phenomenon grows by expanding, man as man grows by concentrating. He proves that he is set above nature, not so much by his power to act, as by his power to refrain from acting. According to Emerson, God himself is defined by the Orientals as the "inner check." I do not happen to know of any oriental book in which this precise phrase occurs, but the idea is found in almost every truly religious book that was ever written in either the East or West.

The chief use of any widening out of knowledge and sympathy must be to prepare man more fully for the supreme moment of concentration and

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selection, the moment when he exercises his own special faculties. Now, to select rightly a man must have right standards, and to have right standards means in practice that he must constantly set bounds to his own impulses. Man grows in the perfection proper to his own nature in almost direct ratio to his growth in restraint and self-control. The neo-classic humanists were right after all in looking on the highest law as a law of concentration,—a law of unity, measure, purpose. Only they were wrong in turning this law into mere formalism. The sentimental naturalists, however, erred still more gravely when in getting rid of the formalism they got rid at the same time of unity, measure, purpose, and gave themselves up to mere emotional expansion. This meant in practice getting rid of the very idea of a special law for human nature. For the word law means in practice the establishing of a causal sequence between a certain number of isolated facts or phenomena ; and any one who seriously sets out to establish a causal sequence between the facts of human nature will speedily come to recognize other forces besides those of expansion. Furthermore all the experience of the past, cries, as

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though with a thousand tongues, through the manifold creeds and systems in which it has been very imperfectly formulated, that the highest human law is a law of concentration. Therefore the sentimental naturalist wants none of this experience; he would live as though "none had lived before him," and, in his attempt to remain purely expansive, try to set up the things that are below the reason as a substitute for the things that are above it. I have actually heard Sophocles called romantic because of the "Œdipus at Colonus." But what relation is there between the wonder of the child and the religious awe that broods over all the latter part of this play? To lose sight of such distinctions is to show one's self, not childlike, but childish.

By no means all the romanticism of the past century has been of the Rousseauistic type. A great deal of it has simply been what one is tempted to call the normal romanticism of the human spirit, its propensity for fiction, for wonder, adventure, surprise, rather than for the tracing of cause and effect. But all the forms of romanticism have received an immense stimulus from the naturalistic movement. Professor Santayana speaks of the "romantic

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drama, where accidents make the meaningless happiness or unhappiness of a supersensitive adventurer." Now the romantic drama has ceased to be an important *genre*, but Professor Santayana's phrase may in most cases be applied with equal appropriateness to the only literary form that has in these latter days retained vigor and vitality, — the novel.

The novel is the one *genre* that the neo-classicists had not regulated, partly, no doubt, because they had not thought it worth the trouble. It had no formal laws and limits, and so was admirably adapted, as Rousseau showed in the "Nouvelle Héloïse," to free emotional expansion. The novel is not only the least purposeful of the literary forms, the one that lends itself most naturally to all the meanders of feeling, to a vast overflow of "soul" in the romantic sense, but it also admits most readily a photographic realism, — that is, an art without selection. The triumph of the novel has been, if not the triumph of formlessness over form, at least the triumph of diffuseness over concentration. Friedrich Schlegel was right from his own point of view in exalting the novel as a sort of confusion of all the

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other literary forms,¹ the visible embodiment of that chaos of human nature of which he dreamed.

The relation between sentimental naturalism and the prodigious development of fiction in the nineteenth century is obvious. This development is also related, though less obviously, to scientific naturalism; for the nineteenth century was not merely the most romantic, it was also the most analytic of centuries. So far from taking life purely as an adventure, it was engaged most actively in following out causes and effects and so arriving at the notion of law; but the law that it was thus tracing was the law of phenomenal nature, "the law for thing." This scientific investigation of nature and the sentimental communion with nature of the Rousseauist seem at first sight to diverge radically, especially if we remember the attacks on science by many of the romanticists (beginning with Rousseau himself). But this divergence is more apparent than real. In the first place the scientist has never taken any too seriously the lamentations of the romanticist over the disenchanting effects of analysis. He knows that his own hegemony is not

¹ Schlegel set out deliberately to confuse the *genres* in his own novel *Lucinde*.

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threatened by any number of romanticists, that he is a stronger and more masculine individual. Then, too, he recognizes an element of truth in the romantic contention. Analysis is desiccating and takes the bloom off things, he admits. He feels the need of recovering this bloom, of plunging into the spontaneous and the unconscious, of cultivating the naïve and the primitive, in due subordination of course to analysis. It was in this spirit that John Stuart Mill read Wordsworth's poetry.¹ It is indeed the normal relation not only of the scientist but of the modern man in general, toward art and literature. He is feverishly engaged in the conquest of matter and in following out the strict causal sequences that are necessary to this end. When he comes to literature he has already had his fill of analysis, of cause and effect, and aspires rather to something that loosens and relaxes the mind, to something that is naïve and illogical and unexpected. He is willing to look on life for a while from the angle of Alice in Wonderland; or subside into the Peter Pan point of view; or even become one of the Babes in Toyland. He is ripe for the light novel, or the extravaganza, or

¹ Cf. Höffding's *History of Modern Philosophy*, vol. ii, p. 399.

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the musical comedy; and the romanticist stands ready to supply him with these things. To be sure, the romanticist often claims to be a sublime idealist. But having lost all sense of a definite human law and of the standards and discipline it implies he is in reality reduced to the rôle of catering to those who wish relaxation from analysis — to the tired scientist, and the fagged philologist and the weary man of business. We have here the explanation of the enormous vogue of fiction in these latter days as well as the reason why art and literature are appealing more and more exclusively to women, and to men in their unmasculine moods.

One cannot hope to understand the nineteenth century without tracing this curious interplay of scientific and sentimental naturalism. Let us illustrate concretely from one of the great representative figures of the century, perhaps the most representative of modern philologists, Ernest Renan. "The more a man develops intellectually," says Renan, "the more he dreams of the contrary pole, that is to say of the irrational, of repose in complete ignorance, of the woman who is only woman, the instinctive being who acts only on the impulse of an

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obscure consciousness. The brain scorched by reasoning thirsts for simplicity as the desert thirsts for pure water," etc. In other words, intellectual unrestraint is to be tempered by an unrestrained emotionalism. The "debauches of dialectic" that produce "moments of dryness, hours of aridity" are to be offset by the "kisses of the naïve being in whom nature lives and smiles."¹ This is the dream of a nineteenth-century Titan who hopes to scale heaven by piling the emotional Ossa on the intellectual Pelion; who will do anything rather than recognize a law that imposes measure on all things — even the *libido sciendi*. One is tempted to add, at the risk of being thought flippant, that all this talk of the "kisses of the naïve being" as a substitute for religious restraint smacks of decadence. Besides, the woman who is only woman in Renan's sense is a *genre tranché* that promises to be increasingly rare. Not every Rousseauist can hope to be as fortunate as the master and find a Thérèse Levasseur.

Possibly the dryness and aridity Renan associates

¹ For all the passages I have quoted, see *Préface to Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*. I have discussed Renan more fully as a type of the nineteenth-century naturalist in the introduction to my edition of the *Souvenirs* (D. C. Heath & Co., Boston).

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with the study of the natural law is due at least in part to the interpreting of this law too strictly. For one remarkable point is to be noted about the men of the nineteenth century: if they held the law for man loosely or not at all, they often made up for it by holding too rigidly the natural law. In other words, during this period man was an impressionist about the law of his own being and a dogmatist about the law of physical nature. For however different the law for man and the law for thing may be in other respects, they have one important resemblance: neither law can be finally formulated, for the simple reason that each law takes hold upon the infinite, — the one upon the infinitely large, the other upon the infinitely small. These are the two infinitudes of which Pascal speaks. Man thinks, says Pascal, that he has found firm foundations on which he can rear himself a tower even to the infinite; but at the very moment when his hopes are highest, the foundations begin to crack, and yawn open even to the abyss. The scientific dogmatists of the nineteenth century imagined that they had reared a tower of this kind. Some of them are as good examples of what I have

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termed the error of intellectualism or the metaphysical illusion, as was any theologian of the Middle Ages. Did any theologian ever carry further what one may call the intoxication of the formula than Taine?¹ Many of the speculations of science merely represent the desperate strainings of the human spirit to grasp in its essence and formulate what must forever elude it,—the final truth of the infinitely small,—just as a certain type of theology is an equally futile attempt to grasp in its essence and formulate the infinitely great. We must note, however, one fortunate difference: no one is likely to be burned at the stake for not holding right views about ions and electrons, as men once were for not being orthodox about the Trinity.

Furthermore, a less dogmatic temper is becoming apparent among the scientists themselves. The

¹ We may note as an extreme example the passage in which Taine derives the whole of Roman history from one sharply formulated law: "Oubliez l'immense entassement des détails innombrables. Possédant la formule, vous avez le reste. Ils tiennent au large dans une demi-ligne; vous enfermez douze cents ans et la moitié du monde antique dans le creux de votre main" (*Philosophes classiques du XIX^e siècle*, pp. 367, 368). This book ends with the vision of a single gigantic scientific Formula that is to contain the whole truth of nature.

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foundations of their tower of intellectualism that seemed so firm to the men of the mid-nineteenth century, are already beginning to crack visibly. In practice this means that the scientists are coming to hold the idea of law more fluidly. For example, M. Poincaré says in his book on the "Value of Science," which has been selling in France like a popular novel, that science can never arrive at essences; at most, scientific "laws" can be only a provisional and approximate expression of relationships.¹ If we compare M. Poincaré's book with a book like Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe," we shall be conscious of a certain decrease in scientific dogmatism, though there is still room for improvement. If the perception gains ground that man's knowledge of physical, like his knowledge of human nature, is destined always to remain a mere glimpse and infinitesimal fragment, there may be hope of reaction against what one may call scientific Titanism. There might even be some recovery of that true humility—the inner obeisance of the spirit to something higher than itself—that has almost become one of the lost virtues.

¹ *La Valeur de la Science*, par H. Poincaré; p. 267 and *passim*.

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Of course, the diminishing faith in scientific intellectualism may simply lead to an oscillation toward the Rousseauistic pole. This as a matter of fact is what we see in contemporary philosophers like Professor James and M. Bergson. M. Bergson's point of view is a protest against the hard and cramping determinism that certain scientific dogmatists would impose upon the human spirit ; it is at the same time a plea for creative spontaneity. But M. Bergson does not himself overstep the bounds of naturalism. His spontaneity is Rousseauistic, not Platonic ; that is, it aims at vital expansion and not at vital concentration. The very phrases of M. Bergson that are most current are significant in this respect, — phrases for instance like *élan vital* and *poussée intérieure*. The main concern of a Platonist would have been with that something that seems to proceed from the innermost recesses of man's being, and that makes itself felt, not as impulse, but rather as a norm and check upon impulse, — not as an *élan vital*, but rather as a *frein vital*. M. Bergson's revolt from the stark determinism in which a certain over-analytic and mechanical conception of scientific truth would

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imprison nature and human nature reminds one of some of the German romantic philosophers. Only we may note among other differences, that the Rousseauistic element in M. Bergson's thinking, his exaltation of the vital and the spontaneous, does not, as it so often does in a Schelling or a Schleiermacher, assume a pseudo-Platonic mask. The world has grown so "tough-minded" in the interval that it is willing to put up with a philosophy that has laid aside even the pretext of unity.

The reaction we have been describing against certain exaggerations of the scientific spirit is evidently not one that can altogether satisfy the humanist. This point will become clear if we consider for a moment the bearing of exaggerated science, or as we may term it, pseudo-science, upon our present problem regarding the nature of the *genres* and the proper boundaries of the arts. Science, we should add, may become false either by holding its own law too dogmatically, or else by trying to set up this law as a substitute for the human law. I have already mentioned a book that is an egregious example of both kinds of pseudo-science, Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe." Books like that of

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Haeckel suggest that nowadays we are as prone to err by interpreting human nature in terms of physical nature as men once were by doing the exact opposite. Thus the ancients had a theory that when the giant Enceladus, who was pinioned under Mount Ætna, tried to turn over, the whole of Sicily trembled. Some of Haeckel's theories are about as near to accounting for human nature as was this ancient theory to accounting for earthquakes. Milton, again, speaks of the comet that from "his horrid hair shakes pestilence and war." But the comet is now related to laws that are independent of human hopes and fears, and so it has ceased to be a portent and is entered in the "dull catalogue of common things"; and this is a gain, but not an unmixed gain if we are thus led to suppose that we can compute the orbit of human nature by methods similar to those employed for the comet.

Naturalists, both sentimental and scientific, tend to reduce everything to terms of motion, to see everything passing over into everything else by almost insensible gradations, to refuse to accept any firm line of demarcation. We have already seen how the German romanticists felt emotionally this

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running over of every art into every other art (page 124). The scientific naturalists have the same point of view. "Everything," says Diderot, who was both a scientific and sentimental naturalist, "is a perpetual flux ; every animal is more or less man ; every animal is more or less plant ; every plant is more or less mineral ; there is nothing precise in nature." Because the genera and species evolve and run together in this way on the physical plane, it is easy to take the next step and assume that the literary *genres* evolve and run together in the same way. This is what is known as the biological analogy. But any one who would make of this comparison between the natural genus and the literary *genre* anything besides a more or less useful metaphor, at once falls into pseudo-science. Brunetière, for example, is pseudo-scientific in his literary Darwinism or *évolution des genres*. The reason is obvious: the *genres* are related not merely to the natural law, but in a vastly higher degree to the "law for man." The whole matter is summed up in a pregnant phrase of Aristotle's:¹ "Tragedy after passing through many transformations finally

¹ *Poetics*, iv.

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found its true nature and there it stopped." This true nature, the point of pause and perfection, can be judged only with reference to the human law and its demands for unity, measure, purpose, and not with reference to the physical law which in itself can give only an endless flux and relativity. Nature is the region of the Many. If art is to be humanized, it must not simply flow with nature but be checked and tempered by some perception of the One. That is why, from the humanistic point of view, there is no particular gain in oscillating between the extremes of the naturalistic movement, in opposing the Rousseauistic extreme to the scientific and analytical extreme, or vice versa. The confusions with which we are troubled may be traced to two main sources, emotional unrestraint and pseudo-science; and both these sources of confusion take their rise in an excess of naturalism. Therefore, if we are to escape these confusions we need, while retaining the naturalistic virtues, to assert also the human law and transcend in important respects the whole naturalistic point of view. In other words, a humanistic revival to be effective, must imply some degree of reaction against both romanticism

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and science, against both the impressionism and the dogmatism that were peculiar to the last century.

It remains for me to establish a closer connection between the theory I have just outlined regarding the limits of naturalism and the specific problems I have been discussing in this book. I hope at the same time to give the theory itself something of the definiteness and concreteness it still lacks.

2. FORM AND EXPRESSION

If the foregoing analysis is correct, the nineteenth century was a period of naturalistic excess, and therefore inclined to favor too exclusively the virtues of expansion. All the formal boundaries and limits that the past had set up were felt only as fetters to be snapped asunder in order that the human spirit might expatiate at liberty. We need to consider for a moment the effect of these expansive tendencies on the idea that must underlie more or less all creative efforts in either art or literature, — the idea of beauty. Far be it from me to attempt any abstract definition of beauty. This, to judge from the vast majority of works on æsthetics, is a temptation of the enemy. But we

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may draw certain interesting conclusions if we study what men have actually meant at different epochs when they spoke of a thing as beautiful; if we note the curious ways in which the word beauty has been warped to make it conform to the half-truth that happened to be in vogue at any particular time.

Thus for a certain type of neo-classicist beauty resided almost entirely in symmetry and proportion. But the symmetry and proportion, as he conceived them, were not vital but mechanical. If we took some of the theories of the Renaissance at their face value we should have to conclude that beauty in the plastic arts is something that can be constructed with a rule and compass. We have studied elsewhere this constant neo-classical tendency to confound form with formalism. As we approach the nineteenth century we find that there is a diminishing emphasis on the formal element in beauty and a growing emphasis on the element that is described by such epithets as vital, characteristic, picturesque, individual, — in short, on the element that may be summed up by the epithet expressive. In painting, color grows in favor as

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compared with line ; in all the arts the principle of motion prevails increasingly over the principle of repose, the suggestive detail over design and composition. In brief, expression triumphs over form. Indeed, if we follow down the attempts that men have made during the past two or three centuries to define beauty, we shall find that the formal element has vanished away more and more, until nothing has been left but pure expression. (We may note in passing that this is exactly what happened to the Cheshire cat.) The ultra-romanticists go still further. Beauty is not only reduced to expression, but the expression itself is swallowed up in revery. Beauty becomes a sort of pursuit of the Chimera. Thus for Poe the highest beauty is the fugitive glance of a woman's eye, and a dream woman at that :—

And all my days are trances,
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy gray eye glances
And where thy footstep gleams —
In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams.

Beauty, as conceived by Poe and at times happily

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achieved in his verse, may be defined as a musical nostalgia. If we connect this conception with Poe's definition of poetry, "the rhythmical creation of Beauty,"¹ we shall have an interesting contrast with the Renaissance notion that the essence of poetry is the imitating of human actions "according to probability or necessity."

As a matter of fact the most extreme of modern æsthetic theories are merely an attempt to formulate what Poe and many other writers and artists have actually been putting in practice for the past hundred years. We may take, as an example, the æsthetic theorist who is perhaps most prominent in Germany just now, — Professor Theodor Lipps.² Lipps carries to what we may hope is its ultimate exaggeration the Rousseauistic view of art, — the exaltation of motion over repose, the emphasis on trance-like illusion and pure suggestiveness. He tends to reduce beauty to a mere process of "infeeling,"³ and virtually eliminates any over-

¹ For Poe's definition of both beauty and poetry, see his essay on *The Poetic Principle*.

² *Æsthetik: Psychologie des Schönen*; Teile I, II, 1903, 1906.

³ Lipps's process of *Einfühlung* is closely related to that melting of man into outer objects in a sort of reverie which I have dis-

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arching law of symmetry that would set bounds to all this subjectivity. The sense of law, indeed, as something distinct either from the outer rule or individual impulse is, as I have already said, conspicuously absent from the whole modern movement. For example, the neo-classicists tended to turn the laws of verse into a set of narrow precepts,¹ and as a result of these precepts metre became, especially in the hands of the smaller men, mechanical, inflexible, inexpressive. We are familiar in English with the "see-saw" of the couplet. In their reaction from this formalism many of the partisans of the *vers libre* have gone to the opposite extreme and fallen into sheer lawlessness. They have been unwilling to allow even the semblance of a barrier to their spacious dreams, and have made verse so flexible to all the sinuosities and windings of their revery, that they have often made it shapeless. They have succeeded in producing something that,

cussed in another chapter. An article on Lipps and the whole tendency he represents will be found in the *Edinburgh Review* (Oct., 1908) under the title, "Beauty and Expression."

¹ Edward Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* (Third Edition, 1708) is usually taken to be the extreme expression of this tendency in English.

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in spite of M. Jourdain's classification, is neither verse nor prose ; something that is not so much a confusion of the *genres* as the absence of any *genre* ; "an indescribable something," says M. Lemaître, applying Bossuet's phrase about the human corpse after it has reached a certain degree of decomposition, "an indescribable something that no longer has a name in any language."¹ Such is the last stage of eleutheromania. The eleuthero-maniacs of poetry are in the same class as the painters who, in order that they may do justice to their "vision," are forced, as they would have us believe, to violate the most indubitable laws of design ; or with the dramatists who dismiss lightly, as mere conventions, what are in reality convenient summings-up of the universal experience of mankind.

We should never have done if we tried to notice all the ways in which the idea of beauty has been corrupted by those who would make it purely im-

¹ In their metrical experiments, as in so many other respects, the French symbolists were anticipated by the German romantics. Hettner remarks in his book on German romanticism (p. 59) that "the poems in so-called free verse, into which Tieck especially was misled, are absolutely unendurable."

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pressionistic or expressive. One of the most interesting attempts of this kind is that of the Neapolitan critic, Benedetto Croce, whose work on æsthetics¹ has gone through several editions in Italian, and has just been translated into English. He has indeed been hailed by certain enthusiasts as the long-awaited Messiah of æsthetics. Signor Croce reduces beauty to pure expression,² not so much by eliminating form as by giving the word form a meaning of his own,³ — neither the Aristotelian and scholastic meaning, nor, again, that of common usage. As he defines it, form is a mere aspect, the inevitable result, as it were, of true expression. Art has to do solely with the fresh intuitions of sense.⁴ Interference with these intuitions on the part of the intellect is to be deprecated. The higher, or so-called intellectual intuitions, Signor Croce denies.⁵ He discountenances the idea of selection in art. The process by which the impressions one receives are transmuted and finally emerge as original expres-

¹ *Estetica come scienza dell' espressione e linguistica generale*, 1902. My references are to the first edition.

² *Estetica*, p. 81: "noi possiamo definire la bellezza come l'espressione riuscita, o meglio, come l'espressione senz' altro," etc.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 98. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137 and *passim*. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

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sion, is purely intuitive and spontaneous, and beyond the control of the will.¹

In short, Signor Croce is an apostle of spontaneity, but it is the lower spontaneity, — the spontaneity of instinct and not that of insight. His point of view is closely related to that special form of reaction against dogmatic and mechanical science of which I have already spoken. He shows himself one of the keenest of intellectualists in his attacks on scientific intellectualism. He makes many a trenchant distinction of just the kind that we need at present. I therefore regret that I must disagree with him so gravely in fundamentals. I regret that he has adopted a theory of beauty that almost necessarily lays him under the suspicion of belonging to the class of people of whom Dryden speaks, who are ready to put the fool upon the whole world. The conception of beauty as pure expression is really very modern. In order to maintain it, Signor Croce has to part company with Plato and Aristotle, and in general rule out the Greeks as incompetent in the theory of beauty. It is only when he gets down to comparatively recent times that he finds the first

¹ *Estetica*, p. 54.

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glimmerings of the vast illumination that has dawned upon himself.¹ With his expansive view of beauty he looks upon the whole attempt to set up literary and artistic *genres* as an unwarranted meddling of the intellect with æsthetic spontaneity.² All the talk that has gone on in the past about the proper boundaries of the arts, and the confusion of the arts, is, as he would have us believe, a mere logomachy.³

A tempting doctrine plausible and new!

What fools our fathers were if this be true.

We should not fail to note an important resemblance between the pseudo-classicists and modern theorists of the kind I have been discussing. They all agree in reducing beauty to some one thing. The pseudo-classicists were for having only form, and so fell into formalism. Many of the moderns, on the other hand, discover the whole of beauty in those expressive elements that the pseudo-classicist either

¹ The first person, according to Signor Croce, who "penetrated the true nature of poetry and art" (*Estetica*, p. 228) was his fellow Neapolitan, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). In some of his ideas about the spontaneous and primitive Vico may be regarded as a precursor of Rousseau and Herder.

² *Estetica*, pp. 38-41, 147, 465-480.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

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minimized or denied. The Abbé Batteux and Signor Croce are both æsthetic monists, the difference being that Batteux would see in all art only imitation, and Croce only expression. But let us have a wholesome distrust of æsthetic monists as well as of monists of every kind. Monism is merely a fine name that man has invented for his own indolence and one-sidedness and unwillingness to mediate between the diverse and conflicting aspects of reality. If romanticists and naturalists, no less than pseudo-classicists, have been unable to distinguish between form and formalism, and so have tried to reduce beauty to some one thing, there is no reason why we should be like them. Any sound analysis of beauty will always recognize two elements, — an element that is expansive and vital and may be summed up by the term expression, and in contrast to this an element of form that is felt rather as limiting and circumscribing law.

But though form thus limits and circumscribes, we should not therefore regard it as something inert, mechanical, external ; we should not, after the pseudo-classic and romantic fashion, make concentration synonymous with narrowness and contrac-

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tion, with tame acquiescence in tradition and routine. The law of human nature as distinct from the natural law is itself a law of concentration ; only this law should be held flexibly and not formally, and this feat, though difficult, is not impossible with the aid of those higher intuitions at which Signor Croce sneers. Art of course cannot thrive solely, or indeed primarily, on the higher intuitions ; it requires the keenest intuitions of sense. But if art is to have humane purpose, these intuitions of sense must come under the control of the higher intuitions. Otherwise art is in danger of falling into aimless expression, into what Lessing calls *der wilde Ausdruck*. With true purpose and selection, on the other hand, art may achieve form and essential symmetry. Emerson speaks of the instantaneous dependence of form upon soul, and Spenser says in a somewhat similar vein that "soul is form and doth the body make." We may agree with Emerson and Spenser if soul is taken to refer to the region of the higher intuitions ; but it is evident that nowadays not only "soul" but "ideal" and other similar words have been strangely transformed, that they have come to be associated, not with the things that

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are above the intellect, but with the things that are below it, with what I have called the lower spontaneity. We have seen that for Lessing an ideal implied a somewhat stern process of selection and self-discipline with reference to definite standards. Since Rousseau, "soul" and "ideal" do not connote much more than emotional expansion. A man may prove that he has "soul" by indulging in a gush of feeling, and pass as an idealist simply by letting loose his enthusiasm. In short, the words "soul" and "ideal" have already been so feminized that they can be used only with caution and may ultimately become impossible. Indeed, with their elimination of the principle of restraint the sentimental naturalists may finally discredit all the higher values of human nature and the words that describe them, until nothing is left erect but a brutal positivism.

Both Spenser and Emerson in the phrases I have just quoted are consciously Platonizing ; and I myself have associated the higher intuitions with Plato. But I might just as well have associated them with Aristotle ; for it is a fact that should give us pause that the master of analysis no less than the master

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of synthesis puts his final emphasis on these intuitions. Indeed, the form this insight assumes in Aristotle is often more to our purpose, especially in all that relates to art and literature, than the form it assumes in Plato. For example, in describing the region that is above the ordinary intellect Aristotle says that though itself motionless it is the source of life and motion,¹ a conception practically realized one may say in Greek sculpture at its best, which perfected nearly all the arts of suggesting motion and at the same time gave to this motion a background of vital repose. Aristotle's phrase is not only admirable in itself, but it puts us on our guard against another of the main romantic and naturalistic confusions. For just as the romanticists would make concentration synonymous with narrowness and contraction, so they would see in repose only lifelessness and stagnation. Thus Herder complains that Lessing in setting such sharp bounds to expression would make "art dead and soulless; it would be lost in an inert repose that could please only a friar of the Middle Ages,"² etc. Now I for

¹ *Κινεῖ οὐ κινούμενον* (*Met.*, xii (xiii), 7). The idea is of course found in many other passages of Aristotle.

² *Erstes kritisches Wäldchen* (ed. Suphan), p. 76.

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one should not deny that Lessing's conception of repose is in some respects too academic. Yet if art is to be complete, it must have not only expression but form that circumscribes this expression ; and in direct proportion as the form is genuine, it will be suggestive of repose, of a something that without being in the least inert and soulless is nevertheless raised above the region of motion and change. This perfect union of form and expression is of course rare ; but there is evidence in the art and literature of the past that it is not impossible. Mozart, for example, obeys musical law spontaneously, being in this respect at the opposite pole from some of our modern artists who, under pretext of being original and expressive, merely succeed in violating law laboriously. If true art consists in having something to say and then saying it simply, the characteristic of this modern art is to have nothing to say and then to say it in a mysterious and complicated manner.

Expression can never become form or form expression any more than expansion can become concentration or the centrifugal the centripetal. But though form and expression can never be actually merged, it is plain from all that has been said that

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they should stand toward one another not as clashing antinomies but as reconciled opposites. In his essay on "Beauty" Coleridge gives an abstract definition of beauty that does not especially concern us, and then adds: "In the concrete beauty is the union of the shapely and the vital"; and this is very much to our purpose. Though in one sense the shapely must also be vital, as I have tried to show, yet Coleridge's phrase remains a fair statement, perhaps the best in English, of the necessary dualism of beauty. The problem of mediating between the two terms — on the one hand, the outward push of expression, and on the other the circumscribing law — is one that may be solved in innumerable ways, but solved in some way it must be, if beauty is to be achieved that is really relevant to man. This problem has always been present to those who have thought correctly about art. For instance, Horace was thinking of some such contrast when he wrote, "It is not enough for poems to be polished, let them also have charm and lead the mind of the reader wherever they will."¹

¹ Non satis est pulchra esse poemata : dulcia sunt,
Et quocumque volent, animum auditoris agunt.

Pulcher refers in Latin to the formal virtues.

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Nowadays, if a poem enthralled us in the way Horace describes, we should call it beautiful without any more ado; but Horace was too civilized to be guilty of any such one-sidedness. For extremes are barbarous, and if an artist lean too one-sidedly toward either the shapely or the vital, he is in danger of ceasing to be humane. There is no doubt as to the extreme toward which we are inclining to-day. One of the English reviews recently praised as the greatest work of genius of the last quarter-century Thomas Hardy's "Dynasts," — a drama in three parts, nineteen acts, and one hundred and thirty scenes, and at the same time a medley of prose and verse (and very bad verse at that). Now "The Dynasts" is a work of genius no doubt, but of undisciplined genius surely. Though vital it is certainly not shapely. In fact, a few more such performances might reconcile us to a little Aristotelian formalism. To take an example from another field, Rodin's "Belle qui fut Heaulmière" may be vital but can scarcely be regarded as shapely. In general, Rodin and other impressionistic sculptors are straining so hard to be vital and expressive that they are in danger of overstepping the bounds of their art, of violating its

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special form and symmetry,¹ and so of failing to temper their rendering of life and motion with a sufficient suggestion of repose. The whole world seems to be growing increasingly barbaric in this matter of symmetry. I have actually heard the epithet beautiful applied to sky-scrapers. Now sky-scrapers may be picturesque, or vital, or what you will, though they are usually not much more than a mixture of megalomania and commercialism. But even though they did express fully the race of industrial and financial Titans that now has us in its grip, they would still fall short of being beautiful. For Titanism is too unmeasured and unrestrained to represent

¹ There is still something to be said after Lessing and so many others on the boundaries that are imposed on each art by its own special technique, the material in which it works, its relations to time and space, etc. I am of course approaching the subject from an entirely different angle. Those who are interested in the other avenue of approach will find good material in Ludwig Volkmann's *Grenzen der Künste* (1903), a book that turns to account the conclusions of other recent German theorists (especially A. Hildebrand and A. Schmarsow). Volkmann attacks Rodin (pp. 81 ff.) for confusing at times the standards of painting and sculpture. This impressionistic confusion of painting and sculpture often resembles the pseudo-classic confusion of the two arts in producing (at least on the eye that is untrained technically) an effect of writhing theatricality.

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at best more than one of the two terms that must be reconciled in true beauty. Contrast with lower New York the perspectives that open up from the Place de la Concorde at Paris. The Parisian symmetry is perhaps not sufficiently subtle; it is still too reminiscent of the kind that may be constructed with a rule and compass, yet by virtue of it this part of Paris makes a vastly closer approach to the beautiful than anything in lower New York.

But it is vain to talk of form and symmetry to the pure expansionist. As I have said, he tends to identify repose with inertia and concentration with narrowness. He would have us believe that art must aim exclusively at the vital and expressive, or else be fatally condemned to remain in a rut of imitation and go on repeating the same stereotyped forms. This is the fallacy at the bottom of a very celebrated piece of writing of Renan's,—his "Prayer on the Acropolis." Renan here expresses, in language that is itself a model of form, ideas that are a denial of all the formal virtues. He begins after the romantic wont by an outburst of sympathy and comprehension for the Parthenon and the Athenians and Pallas Athene;

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and then enthusiasm gives way to the reflection that the followers of Athene and of classical perfection would after all confine the human spirit in the pinfold of some special form; they would neglect the infinite expressiveness and suggestiveness of other varieties of art. They would know nothing beyond reason and good sense. But the world is greater than they suppose, and so some day they will come to be regarded as the "disciples of ennui." "If thou hadst seen the snows of the pole and the mysteries of the austral sky," says Renan to Athene, "thy brow, O goddess ever calm, would not be so serene, thy head more capacious would embrace divers kinds of beauty."

One could not wish a better example of the romantic tendency to regard as an outer form what is in reality an inner discipline, in other words to confuse form with formalism. If the Parthenon has value, it is only as an adumbration of something higher than itself or any number of particular forms, of the law of unity, measure, purpose. Having got rid of the outer form, Renan would at the same time be rid of the inner discipline and of everything that opposes itself to expansion,

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to an infinite and indeterminate vagabondage of intellect and sensibility. He arrives, as every consistent naturalist must, at pure transformism; that is, he sees everything passing over into everything else by almost insensible gradations. There is no place in the process for the sharply drawn line of demarcation, for the firm and fast distinction. Definite standards are swallowed up in a universal relativity. "A philosophy doubtless perverse," says Renan, "has led me to believe that good and evil, pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, reason and madness, are transformed into one another by shades as imperceptible as those on the neck of a dove." Thus Renan's motto in dealing with ideas is like that of Verlaine in dealing with sensations, *la nuance, la nuance toujours*. Dr. Johnson says we should "neglect the minuter discriminations" and "not number the streaks of the tulip." But that is just what the whole modern school has been doing. This has meant in practice the exaltation of the feminine over the masculine powers of personality, and so the exercise of faculties in themselves necessary and legitimate has assumed the aspect of a decadence, of what M. Lasserre calls

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“an integral corruption of the higher parts of human nature.”

Thus the “Prayer on the Acropolis,” probably the most brilliant piece of prose written during the second half of the nineteenth century, turns out, when examined from the humanistic point of view, to involve a fallacy. We may note here, as closely related to Renan’s fallacy, the incalculable harm that is done to art and literature by a certain conception of progress. The doctrine of progress is often interpreted to mean that man grows by moving in one direction, whereas man actually grows by moving in different directions simultaneously; that is by mediating between various half-truths and partial glimpses of reality. For example, it is proclaimed that the music of Richard Strauss is an advance over that of Wagner, that it has still greater expressiveness and stands for a still ampler freedom. At these glad tidings the innumerable army of faddists hastens to join the procession. But there may be still a few persons who are not content merely to keep up with the procession but who would also like to know where the procession is going, — whether it is headed toward some hu-

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mane goal or is simply getting farther and farther out toward the extreme tip of what Sainte-Beuve calls the romantic Kamchatka. Now our present subject is a sort of watch-tower from which we can sweep a wide horizon and so form some conjecture as to the contemporary movement and its direction. It is plain from all I have said that I myself would conclude from a survey of this kind that what we are now seeing in nearly all fields of human endeavor, in art and philosophy and education, is a violent extreme, — the extreme of scientific and sentimental naturalism. Of course the present movement may continue indefinitely. We may have theories about education still more undisciplinarian than the radical forms of the elective system, a still more pathological outpouring of fiction to the exclusion of the other literary *genres*, sculpture still more impressionistic than that of Rodin and his disciples, music still more given up to the pursuit of overtones and iridescences than that of Debussy, philosophy even more careless of rationality than that of the pragmatists, ideas about art still more subversive of the element of symmetry in beauty than those of Lipps and Croce. In short, the process

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of dehumanizing life and literature may go on forever ; — it may, but we should not count on it, especially if the French saying be true, that good sense is the genius of humanity. In the past reactions have been known to occur against extremes of this kind, and they have occasionally been sudden. Even the faddist should therefore temper his eagerness to keep up with the procession with some thought of the danger of coming in at the very end of any movement ; as the Spanish proverb says, the last monkey gets drowned. For over a century now there has been an almost exclusive play of centrifugal forces ; of exploration into the remote and outlying regions of nature and human nature. Some day, perhaps not remote, there may be a counter-movement toward the centre. In short, to revert to a psychological theory I have already used, the world may now be menaced by a “subliminal uprush” of common sense—however alarming this prospect may be to Mr. Bernard Shaw and his followers.

But all such prophecy is vain ; everything depends on leadership, and one can never say whether the right persons will take the trouble to be born. In this sense we may agree for once with Victor

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Hugo, that the future belongs to God. It is of course far from certain that the world will ever see another humanistic era. For example, Sainte-Beuve, who was eminent both as a humanist and a naturalist, inclined to think that France had already had her classic age and was now on the descending slopes of decadence, where it was already difficult and might soon become impossible to have any glimpse of true beauty.¹ Sainte-Beuve was perhaps too much haunted by this notion of the classic age,—the notion that a country like an individual has its period of childhood, and adolescence and full maturity and senile decay. This is another “biological analogy” that I for one distrust profoundly. If we must have a theory, the theory of the saving remnant might be more to our purpose than that of the classic age. Any one who makes a stand for a humane and vital concentration may

¹ For Sainte-Beuve's ideas on this subject, see especially *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire, passim*. The first influential application of the idea of the classic age to France is that of Voltaire in his *Siècle de Louis XIV* (chaps. i and xxxii). Voltaire himself was probably influenced by the Abbé Du Bos, who sets forth the whole theory at great length, translating the inevitable passage at the end of Velleius Paterculus (*Réflexions Critiques*, 2^o partie, sects. 12-14).

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perhaps, with somewhat less than the normal amount of illusion, look on himself as belonging to the saving remnant; he may at least be sure that he belongs to an infinitesimal minority. What Matthew Arnold would call the "elephantine main body" seems more convinced than ever that man, to become perfect, has only to continue indefinitely the programme of the nineteenth century, — that is, to engage in miscellaneous expansion and back it up if need be with noisy revolt against all the forms of the past. Any one who holds a different view is set down at once as a mere laggard and reactionary. But the man who is urging humane concentration may rather regard himself as a pioneer and leader of a forlorn hope, whereas the true laggard — and a dangerous laggard at that — may turn out to be the apostle of everlasting expansion, the kind of man who may be defined as the nineteenth century that is unwilling to complete itself. For this kind of man is rendering inevitable a concentration that will not be humane, but of the military and imperialistic type peculiar to epochs of decadence. When the traditional checks and inhibitions finally disappear and *élan vital* gets under way on a grand

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scale, with no countervailing *frein vital*, the only law that can decide which nation or which individual is to expand vitally and unrestrained is the law of cunning or the law of force.¹ Such is the inevitable upshot of a pure naturalism.

Dark as is the outlook for the humanist, there are nevertheless some signs that the crest of the naturalistic wave has already been reached and that from now on we may expect some subsidence. On the sentimental side the naturalistic movement first found significant expression in the theory of the spontaneous and the primitive, and in one quarter, at least, the origin of the epic, romantic primitivism is plainly waning. We have seen that the neo-classic exaggeration in regard to the epic, as well as the other *genres*, was to turn it into a cold and deliberate concoction of the intellect. Buckingham, for instance, was convinced that Le Bossu, the chief

¹ The humanitarian will of course reply that all this expansion will be sufficiently tempered by an increase in altruism. Unfortunately the evidence is as yet rather scanty that the human nature of the future is going to differ so radically from the human nature of the past. To illustrate concretely, the growth of international good will does not seem to reassure the English entirely regarding the vital expansion of Germany.

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neo-classic authority on the epic, had explained the "mighty magic" of Homer. The counter-exaggeration of the romanticists was to eliminate the element of conscious and deliberate art and make of the Homeric poems an almost unconscious emanation of the folk-soul. The opinion is now gaining ground that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not primitive but works of consummate art, though the word art, of course, is not understood in quite the same sense as by Le Bossu. We can even see the beginnings of reaction against primitivism in the latest theories as to the origin of the mediæval epic.

The decay of the romantic theory of the primitive and the spontaneous has important possibilities. This theory is responsible in no small measure for the mortal debility of intellect and character and will that is so evident in one whole side of the modern movement. We all know what this Rousseauistic side of romanticism has come to in its last pitiful representatives, — an Oscar Wilde or Paul Verlaine. The latest romanticists have discredited themselves, which is not perhaps a serious matter; but they have also thrown a certain discredit on art

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and literature, and this is far more serious. Think of the meaning that is coming to be attached in popular usage to the phrase "artistic temperament." The most urgent task just now is to react against the comparative neglect of the intellect and of what is above the intellect, which assumes so many forms in Rousseauism. The man of letters should not be so modest as to leave all the analytical keenness and intellectual virility to the scientist. Art cannot live on intellectualism, yet the pathway to the kind of creative art we need lies through the intellect. So far from fighting shy of the "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions," we should make as many and as clear distinctions as possible and then project them like vivid sunbeams into the romantic twilight. That indeed should be the function of criticism at the present hour, — to bring once more into honor the broad, masculine, and vigorous distinction. We might then have a type of writing that is not intended primarily for women and men in their unmasculine moods, — for the tired scientist and the fagged philologist and the weary man of business.

The revival of the firm and masculine distinction

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can alone save us from the confusions that have crept into modern life and literature and that I have traced to two main sources, — emotional unrestraint and pseudo-science. To take an illustration almost at random, think how much of both enters into Zola's theory and practice of the novel. The pseudo-scientist sees only flux and motion, not only on the physical but also on the human plane, with no clearly defined frontiers anywhere. He thus co-operates in a way with the romantic eleutheromaniac who wants unlimited emotional expansion. But, as I have already said, if emotion is to be humanized it must become selective, and in direct proportion as it becomes selective it ceases to be indeterminate: it acquires aim and purpose, form and proportion. The mere outward push of expression does not by itself suffice. The object on which expression expends itself must be intrinsically worth while, and this is a point that must be determined on other and higher grounds than individual feeling. We have here the truth that underlies what is apparently one of the worst of the neo-classic pedantries, — the hierarchy of the *genres*. The *genre* is to be ranked according to the intrinsic value and impor-

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tance for man of the matter it treats. Because the neo-classicists turned this truth into mere conventionality there is no reason, let me repeat, why we should be like them. The essential thing, says Aristotle speaking of tragedy, is to get a good plot, and good plots are not easy to come at. According to the romanticists almost any outer incident will do if we only feel strongly enough about it. If the emotional reaction is right, we shall, as Wordsworth admonishes us, "find a tale in everything." An old man hacking vainly at a root with his mattock will then seem to us as fit a subject for poetry as

Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

Wordsworth's paradox, like many other paradoxes, has its own truth and usefulness, but the man who holds it is prone to fall into what M. Las-serre calls *l'emphase romantique*, romantic fustian; which may be defined as the enormous disproportion between emotion and the outer object or incident on which it expends itself. Victor Hugo abounds in fustian of this kind. A good example of musical fustian is Richard Strauss's "Domestic

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Symphony." The disproportion here between expression and what is expressed is so obvious that one critic charitably hints at mental derangement. I read in one of the accounts of this composition that there are required for its performance, in addition to the usual strings, "two harps, four flutes, two oboes, one oboe d'amore, four clarinets, one bass clarinet, four bassoons, one double bassoon, four saxophones, eight horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one bass tuba, four kettle-drums, triangle, tambourine, glockenspiel, cymbals and big drum," — and all to describe the incidents of baby's bath!¹

After all, there is no great mystery about this question of the *genres* and the boundaries of the arts if we consider it vitally and not formally. It reduces itself to this: a clear-cut type of person, a person who does not live in either an emotional or an intellectual muddle, will normally prefer a clear-cut type of art or literature. Thus he is not likely to care for a theatrical sermon or a play that

¹ I should add that all the admirers of Strauss are not agreed about this describing of baby's bath. The *Domestic Symphony* can scarcely be so interpreted however as to affect my main thesis, — that there is a great deal of expression here compared with the intrinsic importance of what is expressed.

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preaches. In many historical novels he will feel that history is travestied without any corresponding gain for fiction. He will be partial to music that is first of all music and to poetry that is above all poetry. He will distrust a symphony that becomes intelligible only with reference to some picture or poem. He will not ordinarily care for a painting that is merely a symbolical transposition of a sonnet, or a sonnet that is a symbolical transposition of a painting. He will desire each art and every *genre* to be itself primarily, and to give, as Aristotle says of tragedy, its own special pleasure. This is the one serious argument against tragi-comedy, that in trying to give the special pleasure of both tragedy and comedy it may fail of the fullest unity of impression. A unified impression cannot be obtained without some degree of concentration, relevancy, purpose. This chief emphasis on the masculine elements in art need not imply any disdain for the feminine virtues, or lead to an academic excess of gray design. Right design is the first requirement, but there should also be color and movement and illusion, and, in general, expressiveness — the more the better. Each art and *genre*

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may be as suggestive as it can of other arts and *genres*, while remaining true to its own form and proportion. But to set color above design, illusion above informing purpose, suggestiveness above symmetry, is to encourage that predominance of the feminine over the masculine virtues that has been the main cause of the corruption of literature and the arts during the past century, — what one may in fact term the great romantic, or it might be more correct to say Rousseauistic, error.

Though the clear-cut type of person will incline toward the clear-cut type of art, the *genre tranché*, — he will be guided in deciding what is sufficiently clear-cut and what is an unjustifiable hybrid, by tact and a sense of measure and not by any rule of thumb. Matthew Arnold, commenting on the mess Wordsworth made of his attempt to classify his poetry on a new plan, remarks that the Greeks displayed an almost infallible tact in making distinctions of this kind; and we may add that they showed their tact not only in the *genres* they established, but in holding these classifications fluidly. In Greek tragedy, for example, there is a free interplay and coöperation of the different arts and *genres*; they

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are separated only by a slender and sinuous thread, as André Chénier says, but a thread that is never broken.

In short, the Greeks at their best had humane standards and held them flexibly. They thus effected in some degree that mediation between the One and the Many that is the highest wisdom of life. This is an achievement so difficult for a lover of half-truths, like man, that we still have to look to Greece for our chief evidence that it is possible at all. The actual forms in which the Greek embodied his mediation between extremes are relative and need not be literally revived; but though relative, as particular forms must always be, they point the way to laws that are absolute. The man of our own time who really learned the lesson of Greek life might produce work that had little outer likeness to the Parthenon or a play of Sophocles or a dialogue of Plato, but his work would resemble these Greek forms in having vital unity, vital measure, vital purpose. I am not of course urging any blind worship of the Greeks or undervaluing all that has amplified and enriched human life since classical antiquity. As a whole Greek life may serve as a warning at least as much

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as an example, but the warning is no less relevant to our contemporary world than the example. The critical moment of Greek life was, like the present, a period of naturalistic emancipation, when the multitude was content to live without standards, and the few were groping for inner standards to take the place of the outer standards they had lost. The Greek problems were like our own, problems of unrestraint; for what we see on every hand in our modern society, when we get beneath its veneer of scientific progress, is barbaric violation of the law of measure. Greek society perished, as our modern society may very well perish, from an excess of naturalism; but Greek art at its best is a triumph of humane restraint. Therefore both in its failures and its success, Greece, especially the Greece of Socrates and Plato and the Sophists, is rich in instruction for us, — more so, I am inclined to think, than any other period of the past whatsoever. This is the very moment that we are choosing to turn away from the study of Greek. One might suppose that before deserting the *exemplaria græca* it would be wiser to wait until the world has another age that proves as clearly as did the great

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age of Greece that man may combine an exquisite measure with a perfect spontaneity, that he may be at once thoroughly disciplined and thoroughly inspired.

I trust that I have at least justified in this book the statement I made at the beginning, that an inquiry into the nature of the *genres* and the boundaries of the arts is far-reaching and involves one's attitude not merely toward literature but toward life. To treat the question exhaustively would require a grasp of general principles and at the same time a knowledge of each separate art and its history to which I for one make no claim. I have not even tried to be exhaustive in this sense. I have aspired at most to be a humble imitator of Lessing in his endeavor, not to achieve a complete and closed system, but to scatter the *fermenta cognitionis*.

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